

A THIEF IN SEARCH OF HIS IDENTITY - NAGUIB MAHFOŪZ'

AL-LISS WA 'L-KILĀB (THE THIEF AND THE DOGS) -

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS WITH A
TRANSLATION OF THE NOVEL

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PREFACE

This dissertation is concerned with the world of Naguib Maḥfouz, a novelist and short story writer. The objective of this study is of multifold; first, to present an English translation of al-Liss wa 'L-Kilāb (The Thief and the Dogs) as a specimen of one of Maḥfouz' finest works; second, to present a critical analysis of the novel showing how successfully Maḥfouz utilizes the Western stream of consciousness technique for the first time in Arabic in writing The Thief and the Dogs, and finally, by comparing him with his predecessors and his contemporaries, to show that the author of our concern is one of the very few innovators of the Arabic novel, and the leading literary figure, not only in Egypt, but also in the entire Arab World.

To better comprehend this novel the reader should bear in mind the primary theme it sets forth, that of a thief in search of his identity. Naguib Maḥfouz sets out not to write a murderer's story, but to write the story of a man in search of his identity, a man who attempts to impose meaning on a chaotic world but whose bullets ironically miss their target and lead to further chaos.

The author wishes to express his profound appreciation to his major adviser, the late Dr. Clinton Keeler, for his good counsel and assistance in the preparation of the plan of this study. Special gratitude and indebtedness are also expressed to Dr. Jennifer Kidney, Dr. Gordon Weaver and Dr. Raymond Habiby for the valuable help and

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I owe a special debt to Naguib Mahfouz, the subject of this study, for his invaluable information about his work and himself, and for his help, kindness, and care. I am very sincerely grateful to my teacher and Friend, Dr. Samir Sarhan of the University of Cairo, Egypt, for providing me with the original idea and plan of this study, for looking over the manuscript of the translation, and making valuable suggestions, and for giving me a great deal of his precious time, and finally for his sincere and friendly encouragement. Thanks are also due to Dr. Fatma Mussa of the University of Cairo for providing me with two of her invaluable texts which I used as references in this study and which proved to be very helpful, and to Dr. Hamdi Sakkut for guiding my steps toward a better understanding and appreciation of Mahfouz, the man and the artist, and to Yusuf al-Sharuni for providing me with his text, Dirasat fi 'L-Riwaya wa 'L-Qissa' L-Qasira (Studies in the Novel and the Short Story), and for his kindness and great help.

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Also, a very special appreciation is extended to my wife for her understanding, encouragement, care, and many sacrifices.

Finally, and above all, it is a hopeless understatement to say that I am truly grateful and indebted to our Creator, Almighty God, without Whose help, guidance, and love this study would have never existed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Short Biography of Naguib Maḥfouz

Naguib Maḥfouz was born in December 11, 1911 in Cairo, Egypt, in al-Hussain Quarter. His father was a merchant from a middle-class Muslim family. While he was a young boy the family moved to al-'Abbāsiya, a suburb of Cairo. He was influenced greatly by the al-Hussain Quarter and al-'Abbāsiya and such environmental influence is reflected in most of his novels and short stories.

In his reminiscences of their childhood together, Dr. Adham Rajab (M.D.), Maḥfouz' lifelong friend, furnished valuable and interesting information about the author. In the special Maḥfouz issue of al-Hilal magazine (February 1970), Dr. Rajab declared that Maḥfouz was a first class soccer player, that in his youth he was very talented in provoking laughter and amusement among his friends, skilled at puns ridiculing those who dared laugh at him. In high school, Dr. Rajab remembered Maḥfouz established a club to maintain morality and to resist immoral phrases among the students of the school. Maḥfouz suddenly decided to dissolve the club and joined the club of his opponents so that he would be able to confront them using their own weapons: wit, puns, and pranks. Maḥfouz, said Dr. Rajab, was very sincere and honorable, showing his love and gratitude to his family.

Each Thursday he used to leave his office after a busy day at the Ministry of Waqf (Pious Foundations) in order to have dinner with his mother, brothers, and sisters.¹

Mahfouz was very fond of music. In the same issue of al-Hilāl, Kamāl-al-Najmī wrote that Mahfouz took music lessons in his youth and that he possessed musical appreciation. He was fond of Sālih 'Abdul Haey, a popular singer and composer at that time. Mahfouz and his friends used to go to al-Sakkākīnī Cafe to enjoy listening to the singer on the radio whenever the latter gave a recital.²

Naguib Mahfouz and Dr. Rajab were very close friends. Mahfouz himself admitted that he was grateful to Dr. Rajab, who first directed his attention to literature:

I am obliged to Dr. Adham who guided my steps toward literature. . . . I only graduated from the School of Philosophy, and therefore all my studies were merely philosophical. I never realized that I had the ability to be a writer until two years after my graduation. . . . I needed Dr. Rajab to give me an idea about the modern English Literary School. Thanks to his library; it was of great help. . . .³

In 1934 Mahfouz graduated from the School of Philosophy at Cairo University. "For a while he worked on the staff of the periodical 'al-Risala' and translated a book in English on ancient Egypt which

¹Adham Rajab, "Safahāt Majhūla min Hayāt Naguib Mahfouz" ("Unknown Pages of Naguib Mahfouz' Life"), The special Mahfouz al-Hilāl issue of Feb. 1970, see pp. 92-99.

²Kmāl al-Najmī, "M'ā al-Ginā' wa 'Lmughnīn fi Adab Naguib Mahfouz" ("With Singing and the Singers in Naguib Mahfouz' Art"), al-Hilāl, see pp. 128-136.

³Naguib Mahfouz, al-Hilāl, p. 94.

was ironically enough, to be his first published work."⁴ Maḥfouz made the acquaintance of a very well known Egyptian socialist, Salāma Mūsā, who urged him to write for his journal, al-Majalla al-Jadīda (The Modern Magazine); Mūsā helped Maḥfouz publish his first collection of short stories, Hams al-Junūn (The Whisper of Madness). Since that time Maḥfouz has published several novels and collections of short stories.

After the revolution of 1952, he ceased writing for five years.

In an interview with Maḥfouz concerning this period he declared that:

The circumstances which compelled me to writing, in the past, had completely changed (after the Revolution). Consequently, I found myself in complete inanity and I thought that maybe it was a temporal vacuity, or maybe it was just a kind of harmonious relaxation to contemplate and absorb a new style in writing in the future, or maybe it was the end of my career.⁵

It was not the end, however, for he finally decided after five years that he was ready to write again, making sure this time that he would never use realism again because his mind was preoccupied with new methods, techniques, and subject matter. He decided to develop and to modernize his style. In 1956-57 Maḥfouz published the trilogy.⁶

⁴ Ākef Abadir and Rober Allen, "A Short Biography of Naguib Maḥfouz," God's World by Naguib Maḥfouz (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1973), p. 234.

⁵ Majalat al-Ezā'a (The Broadcasting magazine), Dec. 21, 1957, quoted by Yūsuf al-Shārūnī in Dirāsāt fi-'L Riwāya wa 'L-Qissatu 'L Qasīra (Studies in the Novel and the Short Story) (Cairo: The Egyptian Anglo Library, 1967), p. 21

⁶ Maḥfouz finished the trilogy in 1952 and published it during the years 1956-57. In 1956 Bain al-Qasrain was awarded the State Prize for Literature in Egypt.

Bain al-Qasrain (Between the Two Palaces), Qasr al-Shauq (The Palace of Solicitude), and al-Sukkariya (The Sugar Bowl).

Mahfoūz has occupied several governmental positions. He worked as the director of the Cinema and Theatre Organization, as an adviser to the Minister of Culture, and as a director of censorship. In late 1971 he retired and now writes for al-Ahram newspaper, one of the leading papers in the country. His last work was al-Harāfīsh, a novel which was serialized in October literary magazine, during the summer of 1976. Mahfoūz has declared more than once that he is thinking very seriously of writing his autobiography, but that he is not sure when this work will be done.

Mahfoūz' Place in Arabic Literature

Before the work of Naguib Mahfoūz, the attempts at introducing the genre of the novel into Arabic Literature were immature. The first novel in Arabic Literature of any value was Muhammad Hussain Heikal's Zeinab, published 1914. Zeinab was a romantic novel depicting the life of farmers in the Egyptian countryside of the Nile Valley. The author accurately rendered the village life in that part of the country; Dr. Fātma Mūssā, a well-known critic and professor at the University of Cairo, has stated in her book, The Arabic Novel in Egypt, that Zeinab "was obviously written under the auspices of romanticism"⁷ It was not until the early thirties that any novel of equal value appeared. In 1926 the first historical novel of any value, Muhammad

⁷Fātma Mūssā Mahmoūd, The Arabic Novel in Egypt (Cairo: The Egyptian General Book Organization, 1973), p. 20.

Farīd Abu Hadīd's Ibnat al-Mamlūk (The Daughter of the Mamlūks) was published. The novel was written in a highly elevated classical Arabic and was about the struggle between Muḥammad 'Alī and the Mamlūks during the period 1804 to 1807. The story was combined with historical events, but some of the defects were the poorness of the action and the unbelievable and unnatural things which the hero was capable of performing.⁸ In 1931 Ibrāhīm al-Māznī published his romantic novel Ibrāhīm al-Kātib, in 1933 Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's novel 'Audat al-Rūh (Ressurrection)' was published, and in 1934 Ṭāhā Ḥussain's Du'ā al-Karawān (The Call of the Nightingale) appeared.

Ibrāhīm al-Kātib was a romantic novel about the relationship between man and woman in Egyptian society. The author's technique was to depict the male-female relationship through the portraits of three women: Mary, Shūshū, and Lāylā. The only bridge that linked the three girls was the character of the hero, Ibrāhīm. Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's Ressurrection was a landmark in the history of the Arabic novel. The novel illustrated a small community of bachelors coming to Cairo to enter the University; it also showed Ḥakīm's disgust for the Revolution of 1919. The author used colloquial Arabic in writing his dialogue, a matter which dissatisfied most of his friends and most of the readers as well. But the novel proved to be a success and its influence on the genre of the Arabic novel was great. Dr. Fātma Mūssā writes that,

Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm is now the recognized grand man of the theatre, but he is also one of the fathers of the Arabic novel. His first novel, 'Audat al-Rūh (Ressurrection), . . .

⁸Hamdī Sakkūt, The Egyptian Novel and Its Main Trends From 1913 to 1952 (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1971), see p. 48.

is one of the early landmarks in the history of this literary form. . . . In fact, Tawfīq al-Hakīm's strongest point is dialogue, both colloquial and classical.⁹

Ressurrection was in some ways an autobiographical novel and one of the few to open a new path for other authors to follow. But Hakīm could not stay long with the novel and decided to turn back to his favorite field, the drama.

Although the works of those pioneers were far from perfect they paved the road for other writers to improve the art of the novel in Arabic Literature. Maḥfūẓ was one of those who not only improved, but also universalized to some extent, the Arabic novel.

Maḥfūẓ is considered an innovator in the Arabic novel. One of his characteristics is that he is a writer who always develops his writing according to the circumstances he is dealing with. But what really makes him an innovator, and the leading literary figure in the Arab literary world, is his talent in using the various techniques and forms from Western schools and literary movements and in handling these techniques as masterfully and skillfully as any of the great European or American novelists. On the other hand, as Dr. Hamdī Sakkūt puts it in his book The Egyptian Novel,

Maḥfūẓ' excellent command of Arabic language enables him to express the entire range of human emotion clearly and eloquently. Whereas many earlier novels such as Zeinab, Ibrāhīm al-Kātib, 'Uṣfūr min al-Sharq and Sāra had suffered because the principal character was too obviously a reflection of the author, Naguib Maḥfūẓ had been a prolific writer for almost twenty years before it was possible to identify him with one of his characters, Kamāl 'Abd al-Jawād in the trilogy (1956-57). Indeed one admires in Maḥfūẓ' work the immense variety of characters whose innermost thoughts and emotions are convincingly described. . . .

⁹Fātma Mūsā, p. 25.

Mahfouz' works are undoubtedly the first to provide the Arab reader with an opportunity of entering so many private worlds different from his own limited one. For all these reasons, Arab critics are one in admiring and appreciating Naguib Mahfouz' works.¹⁰

Sakkūt goes on,

With his admirable ability to create a wide range of characters and to portray a tremendous variety of situations, his extensive knowledge of literary techniques and his capacity of welding together the universal and the particular, and for dealing with fundamental human issues, Mahfouz is undoubtedly superior as a novelist to the other writers whose works have been discussed above, and indeed is justly considered by many to be the greatest novelist in the Arab world.¹¹

Although Mahfouz was neglected by the critics for a long time, he kept on writing because he felt that he had a message that he wanted to get through to his readers. It was not until after he published his ninth novel, Bidaya wa Nihaya (Beginning and End), that critics paid any attention to him. He made his way to success and fame after publishing his trilogy. Mahfouz stated that when some of the critics were really against him, he never let the matter upset him, on the contrary, he tried hard to make use of their criticism in developing and improving his writings.¹²

Brief Account of Mahfouz' Development as a Novelist

The Arabic novel, if compared with the European or the American novel, has gone through similar stages of development in a shorter

¹⁰Sakkūt, p. 114.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 141-2.

¹²Rajā' al-Naqqāsh, Udabā' Mu 'āserūn (Contemporary Literary Figures) (Cairo: The Egyptian Anglo Library, 1968), see pp. 167-168.

time. All those stages are represented in the works of Naguib Mahfouz, under whose artistic guidance the Arabic novel has achieved a high level of quality.

Like many writers, Mahfouz started his career as a writer with historical romance. Then Mahfouz turned to realism for a period of about seven years. When he found out that he had no more to say, just after the Revolution of 1952, Mahfouz underwent a period of recreation and relaxation that lasted for five years. In 1956 Mahfouz started to write again, using what we can call post-realistic or symbolic-philosophical techniques.

The Historical Phase (1939-1944)

The historical phase of Mahfouz' work consists of three historical novels: 'Abath al-Aqdār (The Mockery of Fates, 1939), Rādūbīs¹³ (1943) and Kifāh Tiba (The Struggle of Thebes, 1944).

A careful reader will undoubtedly notice that although Mahfouz has chosen historical backgrounds and settings for these novels, they carry out a concealed criticism of the monarch of Egypt, King Fārūq. History, as a theme, is only a frame, a mask which allows the author to criticize the social and political conditions of the time. The setting of these three novels is Ancient Egypt. The Mockery of Fates condemns the tyranny and arbitrary actions of the rulers and depicts the disillusionment of the people of Egypt. The Mockery of Fates indicates, Sakkūt, is

¹³The title is also the name of the name of the beautiful dancer and mistress of the Pharaoh Merenra, one of the main characters in the novel.

. . . similar to Abū Hadīd's first historical novel Ibnat al-Mamlūk. It is full of improbabilities and coincidences, and the hero is faultless and has every conceivable good quality: like 'Alī, the hero of Ibnat al-Mamlūk, he is too good to be true. Yet the novel contains the first indications of an artistic talent which is feeling its way. The psychological descriptions of characters are realistic and convincing, even while the situations in which the characters find themselves are unlikely. The author's powerful imagination enables him to describe battle scenes which are completely lifelike.¹⁴

His second novel Rādūbīs, also a historical romance with an ancient Egyptian setting, condemns royal corruption. In Rādūbīs the young Pharaoh neglects the affairs of his people when he becomes a captive of Rādūbīs' love. His people finally conspire against him and one of the rebels kills him with an arrow.

Mahfouz' third novel, The Struggle of Thebes, condemns British imperialism in Egypt (they had occupied Egypt for nearly 75 years). The people rebel and fight in order to free the Valley of the Nile, both politically and socially. The novel shows the struggle of the Pharaohs and the ancient Egyptians against the invaders from Hyksos. After various battles, the invaders are defeated and the Egyptians free their land under the leadership of the Pharaoh, King Ahmose.

Dr. Fātma Mūsā indicates that Naguib Mahfouz

. . . confessed that he modelled these three first novels on the example of the historical novel of Sir Walter Scott and of Alexander Dumas. The lesson of Sir Walter Scott is obvious in the attempts to portray Ancient Egyptians in their daily life . . . and old customs.¹⁵

The novels of the historical phase are characterized by emphasis on fate and coincidence. They are full of implausible incidents and

¹⁴Sakkūt, p. 72.

¹⁵Fātma Mūsā, p. 49.

minute details of battles and the domestic life of the ancient Egyptians. The language is highly elevated. The characters are "skeletons wearing historical masks. The reader does not share their feelings . . . most of the dialogue is informative rather than impressive or psychological"¹⁶

Mahfouz once said that his aim was to record the complete history of Ancient Egypt, just as Scott recorded the history of Britain in his various novels, but after he had published The Mockery of Fates, Rādūbīs and The Struggle of Thebes, he admitted that the wish to fulfill that plan had vanished:

Suddenly the desire to write historical romance died within me, and I found myself turning to realism in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda (Modern Cairo) without any preliminaries. I remained absorbed in this until I finished the trilogy in April 1952.¹⁷

The Realistic - Naturalistic

Phase (1945-1957)

There are eight novels which represent Mahfouz' realistic - naturalistic phase: al-Qāhira al-Jadīda (Modern Cairo, 1945), Khān al-Khalīlī¹⁸ (1946), Zuqāq al-Midaqq (Midaqq Alley, 1947), al-Sarāb (The Mirage, 1948), Bidāya wa Nihāya (Beginning and End, 1949), and

¹⁶Mahmūd Amīn al-'Ālim, Ta'mulāt fī 'Ālam Naguib Mahfouz (Reflections on the World of Naguib Mahfouz) (Cairo: The Egyptian General Publishing Organization, 1970); p. 31.

¹⁷Sakkūt, p. 115.

¹⁸The titles Khān al-Khalīlī and Zuqāq al-Midaqq are named after actual streets in Al-Azhar a large section in Cairo, Egypt.

the trilogy, Bain al-Qasrain (Between the Two Palaces, 1956), Qasr al-Shaūq (The Palace of Solicitude, 1957) and al-Sukkariya (The Sugar Bowl, 1957).¹⁹

Mahfouz decided to turn to the realistic novel in order to deal directly with the miseries of his own time. By doing so, not only did he build himself a solid reputation as a leading literary figure, but he also established the realistic tradition in Arabic Literature.

In these novels Mahfouz renders the life and problems of the lower middle-class, especially in Cairo, in the thirties and forties. Like a great painter, he portrays how such a class lives with poverty, social injustice, conflict with the authorities and the upper-class, frustration, and depression.²⁰

Generally speaking, the second phase of Mahfouz' development is characterized by an accurate depiction of society within the frame of the events. As in naturalistic novels of the West, fate and inevitability are emphasized. Minute detail, particularly in the trilogy, is one of the characteristics of this phase. The reader encounters a great number of characters in a novel, but only one of those is the central figure around whom the rest of the characters revolve. In some other novels of this phase, as Shārūnī states, we may have more than one important character. Like Dickens, Tolstoy, or Zola, Mahfouz uses a technique which allows him to talk about one particular incident in one chapter and another, completely different, in the next chapter(s). Only after a few chapters have passed does the author

¹⁹The novels of the trilogy also carry the names of actual streets in Al-Azhar.

²⁰Mūsā, see p. 50.

return to the first incident, or idea.²¹ Another important feature of this stage is Maḥfouz' creation of social stereotypes with realistic traits replacing the historical "masked" characters of the first stage; the characters here are more real and human. The reader notices the depiction of social problems and conflicts, but Maḥfouz neither interferes with the action nor preaches or solves any problems. In this phase we live with the individual through his action, we share his feelings and sympathize with him, while at the same time we do not miss the social or the historical issues within which this individual lives.²²

In the novels of the second stage, Maḥfouz leaves the reader with a gloomy impression about the tragic flaws and fates of his characters, who have no choice but to fail and who may pay with their lives for an unexpected change in their fates. Kāmil, the hero of The Mirage, 'Abbās al-Hilw, one of the main characters of Midagq Alley, Hassanain, one of the members of the family in Beginning and End, are among many of Maḥfouz' characters who are victims of an inexorable fate. When Maḥfouz was asked in an interview in Majalet al-Ezā'a (The Broadcasting magazine) about the purpose of the tragic fate of his characters he said:

I have written all those stories at a time when the people had the tendency to believe that optimism or, enthusiasm were a sort of intoxicant or numbness to one's feelings, as well as it was a kind of merely accepting fate as it is. But besides the sad endings of those novels we have to consider the fact that melancholy or misfortune

²¹ Shārūnī, see pp. 16-17.

²² Ālim, see pp. 32-3.

were not all that I wanted to depict. Those stories were written to impel the people to oppose the conditions of the society and to change the cultural system. The hero of my story might commit suicide, but the question is, why?²³

One of the distinctive features of this stage is the desperate quest of the educated or semi-educated members of the middle-class to become part of the upper-class. This is seen with Hassanain, in Beginning and End, who is willing to marry the Pāshā's daughter so that he may join her social class.

Another important quality that marks this phase of Maḥfoūz' development is intellectual duality, such as that between religion and science, between the man of principles and the materialist. Such duality is very vital to the structure of the novel in this stage.²⁴ A great number of the characters in these novels are depicted as immoral. Maḥfoūz explains this matter to Ibrāhīm al-Wardānī in an interview in al-Jumhūriya entitled "Rihla fī Ra's Naguib Maḥfoūz" ("A Journey in Naguib Maḥfoūz' Mind"). He says:

At that time I had the tendency to use homosexuality in my stories only as a symbol to indicate and to refer to the political corruption at the time.²⁵

In using immorality in his novels, Maḥfoūz condemns the authorities and their corruption. As he indicates, the heroes of his novels may

²³Majalat al-Ezā'a, cited by Shārūnī, p. 17.

²⁴As we will see when we discuss The Thief and the Dogs, which belongs to the third stage, duality plays a very important part in the novel, especially the duality between religion and the man of principles.

²⁵Ebrāhīm al-Wardānī "Rihla fi Ra's Naguib Maḥfoūz," ("A Journey in Naguib Maḥfoūz' Mind"), al-Jumhūriya newspaper, (Apr. 19, 1960, p. 20) quoted by Shārūnī, p. 18.

commit suicide or homosexual acts, but the question which must be asked is, why? Also, the emphasis on such sordid aspects of life is also a characteristic of naturalism.

Finally, the language Mahfouz uses in writing the novels of the second stage is a combination of description and dialogue, and he handles the latter item so masterfully that many critics were under the impression that Mahfouz was turning towards drama, following in the footsteps of Tawfiq al-Hakim.

The Post-Realistic Phase

(The Thief and the Dogs)

The Arabic novel before Mahfouz' The Thief and the Dogs had a tendency to concentrate mainly on the external description of characters and events on one hand, and on the conflict either among the characters themselves, or between them and their society, on the other hand. Little attention was paid to the characters' inner experience.

Almost all of the major literary critics have agreed that The Thief and the Dogs is one of Mahfouz' finest and most important works. The novel was first serialized in al-Ahram newspaper, Fridays' issues from Aug. 11 through Sept. 29, 1961. The first edition was published in book form by Misr Publishing Bookstore, Cairo in late 1961.

Although Midagq Alley and the trilogy brought Mahfouz artistic and critical fame, The Thief and the Dogs placed him among the great literary figures of the world. The novel was a great success and won popularity in serialized form, book form, and as a motion picture, not only because the author has a wide and eager circle of readers, but

also because this particular novel was the first of its kind written in Arabic.

The Thief and the Dogs has been discussed extensively by critics of Arabic Literature, most of whom were enthusiastically complimentary. Dr. Fātma Mūsā, in "al-Liss wa 'L-Kilāb Bain al-Funn wa 'L-Wāq" ("The Thief and the Dogs as an Art and Reality"), in Bain Adabain (Between Two Literatures, 1972), was specially concerned with the sources of the story and of the character Saeed Mahrān. In her two essays, "Naguib Mahfouz and the Development of the Arabic Novel" and "Alexandria and the Later Novels of Naguib Mahfouz" (The Arabic Novel in Egypt, 1973), Dr. Mūsā admired Mahfouz' style and his "breaking away from the old technique of meticulous details and panoramic narration,"²⁶ depending here only on the stream of consciousness technique, and by doing so he "has attempted something much more complex, more modern and, what is more, highly artistic."²⁷ Dr. Hamdī Sakkūt's "Mahfouz" (The Egyptian Novel and Its Main Trends: 1913-1952, 1971) was mainly concerned with Mahfouz' use of the stream of consciousness technique and his place as "the greatest novelist in the Arab World." Mahmūd Amīm al-'Ālim in "al-Liss wa 'L-Kilāb" ("The Thief and the Dogs"), in Ta'mulāt fī 'Ālam Naguib Mahfouz (Reflections on the World of Naguib Mahfouz, 1970), discussed the role of Saeed Mahrān, stressing the idea that he was not an "honest thief," as some of the critics used to believe; he was, rather, a blind, stubborn, corrupted thief who failed drastically

²⁶Mūsā, p. 63.

²⁷Ibid., p. 51.

because he thought he was able to successfully confront society alone. At the end of his essay, 'Ālim praised the story which he believed was a "prolonged dramatic and poetic piece of art."²⁸ Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Attiya, in M'a Naguib Maḥfouz (With Naguib Maḥfouz) commented on two issues that concerned some of the themes of The Thief and the Dogs. In "Azmat al-Baṭal al-Thawrī fi Adab Naguib Maḥfouz" ("The Crises of the Revolutionary Hero in the Art of Naguib Maḥfouz") 'Attiya concerned himself with the nature and the meaning of Ra'ūf's betrayal, asserting that that character was "the model for the untrue revolutionary who could be bought so easily,"²⁹ and in "Naguib Maḥfouz wa 'L-Lām'aqūl" ("Naguib Maḥfouz and the Improbable"), 'Attiya stated that although the novel exposed a realistic story of "the honest thief Saeed Mahrān," it also brought to light the attitudes of religion towards social injustice, and the position of the fanatical individual who rejects his society, and how such a rejection was doomed to fail.³⁰

Dr. Latīfa al-Zayāt's, "al-Shakl al-Riwāī 'Enda Naguib Maḥfouz Min al-Liṣṣ wa 'L-Kilāb 'Ilā Mirāmār ("The Artistic Form in Naguib Maḥfouz: From The Thief and the Dogs to Mirāmār") (al-Hilāl, February, 1970) contains a fine commentary on the structure of the novel. After expressing her admiration of the novel, Dr. Zayāt remarks that the symbolic and highly artistic structure of the novel was more than just an artistic necessity. Then she explained the nature and the artistic

²⁸'Ālim, see pp. 86-96.

²⁹Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Attiya, M'a Naguib Maḥfouz (With Naguib Maḥfouz) (Beirut: al-Jīl Publishing House, 1977), pp. 43-4.

³⁰Ibid., see pp. 104-105.

use of the stream of consciousness technique, as used by Maḥfouz in The Thief and the Dogs. Dr. Zayāt ended her article by remarking that the reader of this kind of a novel will always see the author's vision of the conflict in the story, not that of the main character's, because the conflict of the characters of Maḥfouz' third phase will always be ended by failure and death.³¹ Nabīl Rāgib's Qadiyat al-Shakl al-Funnī 'Enda Naguib Maḥfouz (The Case of the Artistic Form in Naguib Maḥfouz, 1975), and Rajā' al-Naqqash's Udabā' Mu'āsirūn (Contemporary Literary Figures, 1968) contained some of the most intelligent analysis of and comments on the structure and the total meaning of the novel.

In his article, "Naguib Maḥfouz Bain al-Dīn wa 'l-Falsafa" ("Naguib Maḥfouz Between Religion and Philosophy") which was reviewed in al-Hilāl, February 1970, Ṣabrī Hāfiz discussed Saeed's search for a spiritual refuge in religion and suggested that the hero's failure in his task was due to the fact that he was blind to reality, and that in order for him to come to any resolutions or any comfort, Saeed must be realistic enough to look for the answers in the real world, because the metaphysical world would be impenetrable to ordinary people like himself.³²

In "al-Mūmis fī Adab Naguib Maḥfouz" ("The Prostitute in Naguib Maḥfouz"), in Hawā' wa Arb'a 'Amāliqa (Eve and Four Giants, 1976), Ṣūfī 'Abdallāh was concerned with the role of Noor, the whore, as a

³¹Latīfa al-Zayāt, "al-Shakl al-Riwāī 'Enda Naguib Maḥfouz" ("The Artistic Form in Naguib Maḥfouz"), al-Hilāl, see pp. 62-75:

³²Ṣabrī Hāfiz, "Naguib Maḥfouz Bain al-Dīn wa 'l-Falsafa" ("Naguib Maḥfouz Between Religion and Philosophy"), al-Hilāl, see pp. 116-127.

symbol of light, honesty, love, and generosity. Sufī 'Abdallah ended her article by stating that in the world of dogs there was one woman who was not really a dog, and that woman was Noor, the prostitute, the possessor of a large and tender heart.³³

'Akif Abādir and Roger Allen, in their translation of a collection of some of Mahfouz' short stories entitled God's World (1973), referred to Saeed's nightmarish world, his quest to avenge himself against Nabawiya and 'Elaīsh, his killing of the two innocents by mistake, and his death.³⁴

Finally, in the introduction to his translation of Mahfouz Midagq Alley (1975), Trevor LeGassick, a foreign critic well acquainted with Mahfouz' works, referred to the novel as a marvelous work. He pointed out that with The Thief and the Dogs, Mahfouz

. . . has changed from realist to impressionist and he used the 'stream of consciousness' technique to pursue the thoughts and motivations of his central characters, It is a powerful and fast-moving work, a drama in which the killing of the hero is inevitable but tragic.³⁵

The Thief and the Dogs (1961) marks a turning point and a new stage in the career and development of Naguib Mahfouz as a writer. In this novel the author uses, for the first time in Arabic Literature, new literary techniques. In this work Mahfouz uses a single character, the hero, Saeed Mahrān, to dominate the entire story, The rest of

³³Sufī Abdallah, Hawā' wa Arb'a 'Amāliqa (Eve and Four Giants) (Cairo: The Egyptian General Book Organization, 1976), see pp. 152 and 164-72.

³⁴'Akif Abadir, see pp. 234 ff.

³⁵Trevor LeGassick, trans., Midagq Alley by Naguib Mahfouz (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1975), p. vi.

the characters are significant only to the degree that Saeed allows them to occupy his thoughts. Many of those characters are either dimly sketched or referred to vaguely; some are even nameless. One of the daring moves which Mahfouz made towards the development of the Arabic novel in The Thief and the Dogs is the use of the stream of consciousness technique, the direct and indirect internal monologue, and the soliloquy.

Broadly speaking, to define these techniques one would say that the stream of consciousness is simply the actual flow of the thoughts and sensations, or rather, the free association of ideas, thoughts, and images floating haphazardly in the mind of the individual. The direct interior monologue may be defined as being that which is used by writers of the stream of consciousness novel to represent the content of the mind, partly or entirely unspoken, just as the actual flow of thoughts exist in that mind. The direct interior monologue necessitates either an entire or near entire absence of the author, the omniscient narrator, and with the assumption that there is no audience. When the direct interior monologue is interrupted by the omniscient narrator, he intrudes only as a guide or commentator. Finally, the soliloquy in a stream of consciousness novel is represented directly to the reader with the assumption of the presence of a fictional audience and the absence of the author.³⁶

In The Thief and the Dogs, the stream of consciousness technique dominates the entire novel. The action takes place and the plot develops through the consciousness of Saeed. In other words, the plot

³⁶Robert Humphrey, Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1954), see pp: 23-25; 29-30 & 35-6.

is unfolded by means of the use of the various aspects of the stream of consciousness technique instead of through straightforward description.

As the novel opens, the reader is placed in the mind of Saeed Mahrān, a convict who has just been released from jail. Through his consciousness we are given glimpses of his past, most of which comes in the form of evoked reminiscences. Out of those reminiscences we become fully aware of his relationships with others, of how his happiness was shattered by a companion he thought his best friend, how he has been betrayed by his wife, and we are given some glimpses of his daughter Sanā'. These reminiscences and flashbacks are not arranged chronologically. Saeed's stream of consciousness is projected as he remembers the past events in his life and each event floats to the surface of his mind only when it is evoked or stimulated by a similar event or situation in the present. Thus, the reader accompanies Saeed through the past, the future, the present, and through the past again, and so on. His past is given to us gradually according to the psychological laws which normally govern the process of the mind and of free association. Everything he sees in the street on his first day of freedom evokes in him a haunting sense of the past, giving the reader opportunity to be face to face with the hero's problems from the first page of the novel.

One of the difficulties that might face the reader of a stream of consciousness novel is the difficulty of determining if a certain passage, or even specific sentence or word, belong to the stream of consciousness of a character, or to the omniscient narrator. The reader is especially puzzled when it comes to shifts from the omniscient

narrator to the consciousness of a character, and vice versa, because such shifting might take place within a single sentence or one idea, as in James Joyce's Ulysses or Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse and Mrs. Dalloway. Mahfouz himself does not recall any direct influence by Woolf or Joyce on The Thief and the Dogs. He says:

The stream of consciousness technique is a Western technique and I was aware of it, even before writing The Thief and the Dogs, in such novels as Zuqāq al-Midaqq (Midaqq Alley) and Khān al-Khalīlī. I was not able to fully use the technique until The Thief and the Dogs; here, we have a thief who is lonely and cast out by society, therefore, the proper technique is that of the stream of consciousness. I don't recall that I was influenced by either Joyce or Woolf when I wrote that novel; not a direct influence anyway.³⁷

The Thief and the Dogs employs all these techniques, with the greatest portion given to Saeed Mahrān's stream of consciousness. Although the omniscient narrator intervenes at times in the consciousness of the hero, he is the least personal and the most detached. Mahfouz uses the omniscient narrator to give the reader an objective picture of Saeed Mahrān and the world around him; the reader is taken back into the hero's mind very gently. Since it is hard to determine the shifts in the various techniques, the following examples are presented to illustrate Mahfouz' use of the stream of consciousness of Saeed Mahrān in The Thief and the Dogs. The opening scene of that novel begins with omniscient description:

Once more he breathes the air of freedom even if the weather is terribly dusty and hot . . . The world is coming back and the solid prison gates are fading away keeping within all sorts of desperate secrets . . . Yet there is no smile on his face. . . .[p. 53].

³⁷ Naguib Mahfouz, Personal Interview. Alexandria, Egypt, August 8, 1973.

Then we are taken into Saeed's mind without even feeling the shift, were it not for the word "well," which indicates the actual flow of his consciousness:

He is a person who lost a great deal, including four valuable years of his life. Soon he will stand before all of them and challenge them. It is time for his anger and hatred to burst and to burn; it is time for the traitors to be scared to death; it is time for treachery to pay for its ugly and horrible face . . . Nabawiya, 'Elaish . . . how could the two names become one [p. 53].

or:

Both of you are worried about this day of retribution. You believed that the prison gates would remain shut forever. You are carefully watching this day. I will not fall into your trap but will, in due course, descend upon you like fate. Sanā', when she comes to my mind, heat, dust, hatred, anger, and depression vanish and are replaced by pure love, as pure as the air after a rain storm [p. 53].

The plot unfolds gradually in Saeed's consciousness for seven more paragraphs without any interruption from the omniscient narrator until he meets Mu'alim Beyāza. Only then does Saeed's first indirect interior monologue begin. Another example of Saeed's full stream of consciousness can be found in the translation, starting with the phrase "he went to the living room where he lay on a sofa," and ending with the long sentence:

But he will not forget, at the end, that she is a woman, as Nabawiya is, the coward, the traitor, who will be killed by her own will to survive. She will be frightened until the noose gets around your neck, or until a murderer's bullet settles in your heart and the police spoil your reputation so that all relations between you and Sanā' are severed forever. She will not even know a thing about the honesty and truthfulness of your love, as if it were also a blind wasted bullet. . . .

Sleep finds its way to Saeed Mahrān's eyes. . . . [p. 126].

The above lengthy meditation occurs in Saeed's stream of consciousness.

At the beginning of his thought the sentences tend to be short and

fully punctuated, but at the end, as he is more depressed, angry, and tired, they become longer and longer, punctuated mostly by commas and semi-colons. Saeed's stream of consciousness is interrupted by sleep and the flow of thoughts ceases without concluding.

Chapter VI could serve as an example of a combination of omniscient description and direct interior monologue. The whole chapter is presented through Saeed's direct interior monologue with few interruptions from the omniscient narrator, who intrudes only as guide and commentator to utter such words as: "he said," "he laughed," "she asked," "he inquired," and the like.

An example of a combination of the omniscient narrator and the direct and indirect monologues is in Chapter VII. This chapter starts with Saeed's direct interior monologue:

To kill Nabawiya and 'Elaiṣh together is the peak of success. Moreover the most successful thing is to get it over with, to kill Ra'ūf 'Elwān, then the big runaway, to escape abroad if possible. But who will take care of Sanā'? The thorn which is planted in my heart. You follow your impulse, not your mind. You have to wait very long, set a plan for your action, and then attack like an eagle. It is no use to wait now, because you are pursued. Yes, you are, since it is known that you have been released from prison, and the chase will be increased after the car incident, although the wallet of the factory owner's son contains only a few pounds; this is also bad luck. If you do not strike fast, soon everything will collapse. But who will take care of Sanā'? The thorn which is planted in my heart, my beloved daughter, in spite of her denial of me. Should I forget all about your mother just for your own sake? I want an answer right now. . . .[p. 103].

The whole chapter proceeds this way. It is Saeed's interior monologue with few intrusive phrases from the omniscient narrator, presented as if it were directly from the consciousness of Saeed himself.

The soliloquy is an important aspect of the stream of consciousness technique in The Thief and the Dogs. The best example of a

lengthy soliloquy might be the passage where Saeed feels lonely, depressed, and unhappy after what Ra'ūf has written about him in his paper. The whole world appears unjust to him. So, in a soliloquy, he defends himself before an imaginary jury (Chapter XV, pp. 156-58).

He went to the window and looked at the graveyard under the moonlight and cried, 'Ladies and gentlemen, members of the jury, listen to me very carefully, because I have decided to defend myself by myself.'

He went back to the center of the room. . . . He stared in the darkness and said, 'I am not like the rest behind these bars before me. Education and culture should receive special consideration in this court. As a matter of fact, there is no difference between you and me except that you are out of jail while I am in it and this is only a slight, insignificant difference. The funny thing is that my dangerous teacher is nothing but a mean traitor and you have the right to wonder, but as it happens the cord which connects the electric bulb might be stained with the dirt of flies.'

Saeed's above soliloquy covers four long paragraphs. Here, both the members of the jury and the reader are his audience. In other soliloquies, Ra'ūf Elwān and the reader are the fictional audience.

The Thief and the Dogs not only deals with the individual, it also focuses on modern man in general, depicting him with his problems, his frustrated status, and his agony. The idea of the individual and the conflict between self and society is reinforced in the novel by frequent references to show the way in which a society drastically alters the individual's life. Throughout the story we recognize Saeed's life as a clear example of how a society can destroy (at least in the hero's mind) the individual, and how that individual is isolated, hopeless, and unable to fight such a society unaided. In The Case of the Artistic Form in Naguib Mahfouz, Nabīl Rāgib points out that within the artistic construction of the novel the author blames society for Saeed's misery, showing that society is responsible for the protagonist's

criminal actions. Rāḡib goes on to say that Maḥfouz conceives of man as basically good, but altered by society.³⁸ Saeed holds society responsible not only for his own criminal actions, his mother's death, and his wife's betrayal, but also for Ra'ūf's, betrayal and for the very fact of injustice. Therefore, he decides to confront that society, a society in which "many sins are committed in broad daylight, but what a pity that theft is not like that," as Saeed thinks.

The novel centers on the struggle of modern man trying to discover a way out of his problems for himself and to demand justice of his society; Saeed is representative of modern man. Saeed's betrayal by his wife and former friends, along with his daughter's rejection of him, are important aspects in the novel, because such betrayal and rejection make it necessary for Saeed to try to take the law into his own hands and avenge himself.

At the beginning of the novel Maḥfouz seems to place the protagonist under the protection of some kind of providence, but at the end he is realistic; his hero must face the consequences of his deeds and give his life to pay for such deeds. Saeed is finally seen, unconscious and bleeding, although he feels nothing and the whole situation appears to him as a dream. He dies, still cursing "the dogs" and society. He fails in his efforts to gain ground against "the dogs" because he is always torn between the objective world and his own feelings and illusions. He is not functioning in this world, he is not realistic enough to comprehend the deeper meaning of this world.

³⁸Nabīl Rāḡib, Qadiyat al-Shakl al-Funnī 'Enda Naguib Maḥfouz (The Case of the Artistic Form in Naguib Maḥfouz), 2nd ed. (Cairo: The Egyptian General Book Organization, 1975), see pp. 250-1.

Setting

The setting for most of the book (Chapters IX through XVI) is Noor's apartment. This setting functions both as a geographical setting and as a psychological element which plays a vital part in the development of the character of Saeed Mahrān. Noor's apartment is in the upper floor of a house which overlooks the cemetery of Bāb al-Naṣr, at Najm al-Dīn Street. The house itself has no number and is identified as "the only house on that street," indicating the fact that Noor herself is like the old house - she has no status in the human race because of her profession. She admits to Saeed that nobody has ever visited her in that house and that he "will be the first man to get into it." The location of the house is significant in that it overlooks the cemetery, a symbol of Saeed's doom: to die just like anyone else. Nabīl Rāgib draws our attention to this fact when he points out that Saeed envisions the graves spread out in great numbers, reaching the horizon, the hands of the dead held up in a gesture of surrender, as if nothing can really threaten them. Actually Saeed is the one who is threatened, the one who will raise his hands in a gesture of surrender.³⁹ The graves remind Saeed of betrayal, hatred, and revenge:

And as much as death betrays living people, the sight of these graves will remind you of betrayal itself, and then betrayal will remind you of Nabawiya, 'Elaīsh, and Ra'ūf, and you, yourself are dead ever since you fired the blind bullet; but you have to fire more bullets [p. 120].

³⁹Nabīl Rāgib, see pp. 247-8.

Saeed spends his time in Noor's apartment doing either of two things as a means to pass time. The first alternative is to look through the window at the cemetery to watch the funerals and to count the graves.

The second alternative is to pass his time in utter darkness:

Darkness spread itself in the room. Outside the window the silence of the graves thickened. But you cannot switch on the light because the apartment must stay as it is when Noor is out of it, but your eyes will get used to such darkness as they got used to the prison and the ugly faces. You are not going to find the opportunity to get drunk, for fear of any misdemeanor you might commit. The apartment must remain as silent as a grave, so that even the dead themselves will not feel your presence in here. God, only God, knows how patient you are in this prison. Only He knows how long you are going to be there [p. 125].

He can also pass the time by observing the sky at sunset, or even by "looking at the pale white ceiling" of the living room:

He went to the living room where he lay on a sofa. He felt lonely in the full sense of the word, even his books were left behind at Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidi's. He tried to kill time by looking at the pale white ceiling which seemed to reflect the old carpet of the room. Through the window he looked at the sky at sunset, the sky which seemed like a gem in which a flock of pigeons fly from time to time [p. 121].

Saeed is tortured by loneliness, isolation, and darkness, even when he leaves the apartment for a stroll:

Suddenly he felt an irresistible urge to leave for a stroll in the night. His resistance collapsed, like an old house collapses, in seconds. In less than a few minutes he was out of the house, walking very carefully toward the road of the factories, and then from there he went to the desert. When he got out of his hideaway his feeling of being followed and wanted increased. He shared with the mice and the snakes their feelings when they sneak out of their holes. Alone in the darkness with the city, whose lights were scattered on the horizon as if ready to jump on him, he felt lonelier than ever [p. 135].

Thus, Noor's apartment is important to the development of the story in that it is the place where the hero takes a refuge, yet is

ironically confronted with death and his own fate whenever he looks out the window at the cemetery. Consequently, we can say that the cemetery is a symbolic setting, while the apartment is a geographical one. In her efforts to show the important role which the cemetery plays, Dr. Fātma Mūssā indicates in her book, Between Two Literatures that:

. . . it is the cemetery which is always within Saeed's sight; he observes it when he looks through Noor's window, he has to walk through the graves whenever he leaves or returns to the house, and finally, he is doomed to die among those graves. Therefore, the cemetery is probably the only fact (concrete) in Saeed's life after his release from prison.⁴⁰

Plot and Structure

The novel begins with Saeed Mahrān just being released from jail, an action which stands symbolically for the hero's rebirth, and ends with his death among the graves.⁴¹ What comes between is a panorama of Saeed's life in the past and his actions in the present, often mixed with his dreams and illusions. The conclusion of the book is dramatic, but expected. Saeed is sunk in gloom at the folly of his own actions and his failure to find refuge in religion, but his ego makes him drunk with the desire to avenge himself no matter what; he is filled with burning resentment at his enemies' betrayal of him. But the police lay siege to the area surrounding Sheikh 'Alī's home and the cemetery, making it impossible for Saeed to escape. Saeed experiences long periods of spiritual dryness and does not take the religious rituals or the Sheikh seriously; thus, he is spiritually dead from the

⁴⁰Fātma Mūssā, Bain Adabain (Between Two Literatures), (Cairo: The Egyptain Anglo, 1965), p. 141.

⁴¹Latīfa al-Zayāt, see p. 63.

beginning of the novel and is doomed to die since he committed his first murder.

The dream in The Thief and the Dogs, Chapter VIII, plays a vital role in the structure of the novel. It is significant in that it exhibits four important elements. First the dream itself serves as a device to distinguish reality from dreams and illusions. Second, the dream reflects Saeed's fear of and hatred for Ra'ūf 'Elwān. It also exposes the hero's sufferings in an unjust society ruled by people like Ra'ūf and the "real thieves." Third, it projects his disgust at the betrayal by Nabawiy and 'Elaīsh. Finally, it reflects Saeed's deep love for Sanā' and his wish to protect her from the dirty "dogs."⁴² This dream is a nightmare where the actual and the imaginary meet, reflecting Saeed's tragic life, his fear, his sufferings, and his emotions.

Style and Other Literary Techniques

The language of The Thief and the Dogs is classical and elevated. Saeed Mahrān's mind is complicated, in that he is concerned with various ideas, images, and impressions, but as the plot unfolds one realizes that no matter how many ideas the hero's mind is concerned with, his thoughts always return to three basic ideas, revenge, his love for Sanā', and his wish to comprehend Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī. Hence, Mahfouz' style varies throughout the novel according to the idea with which or the person with whom Saeed is preoccupying his mind at the time.

⁴²Besides being man's best friend a dog also stands for dirt.

Whenever Saeed thinks of Sanā', the style tends to be uncomplicated. The sentences are rather short and simple, reflecting his profound love for his daughter and his wish to be with her in a "good and pleasant place" so that they can "reveal and exchange their profound feelings of love." Likewise, whenever he thinks about Noor, especially in the last few chapters of the story, his diction tends to be simple and we encounter such words as "mercy," "pity," "love," "tender" and the like. When Saeed thinks about Sanā' or Noor he is at ease and his vocabulary becomes uncomplicated.

Whenever the protagonist's mind is concerned with Ra'ūf 'Elwān, or Nabawiya or 'Elaīsh, the style changes drastically. One encounters complex and difficult vocabulary and complicated ideas; the sentences become slow and long to express such ideas and images as betrayal and death. In these sections such words as "love," and "tender" are no longer used and are changed for words like "betrayal," "traitors," "dogs," "snakes," and the like.

Sheikh 'Alī's sections share the same complexity of ideas and difficulty of vocabulary as found in those sections which deal with the traitors. The Sheikh's world is rather difficult for Saeed to comprehend, hence his diction is more complicated and the ideas and images are philosophical.

The Thief and the Dogs is full of striking symbolic images, metaphors, similes, irony and other aspects of figurative language. The most frequent and striking symbols and images are those of animals, insects, birds, and fish. As for abstract symbols, the most dominant ones are those of death, light, and darkness. Also, one encounters

weather symbols such as heat and dust, color symbols, and concrete symbols such as those of the prison, the hammer, and the palm tree.

The title of the novel provides the major symbol in this work and the meaning of it is illustrated throughout the story. On the first level of meaning "the thief and the dogs" refers to Saeed Mahrān being the thief, while society and all the traitors are the dogs. In Chapter I Saeed compares 'Elaīsh to a dog: "Have you forgotten how you used to lick my feet like a servile dog, 'Elaīsh?" He further degrades 'Elaīsh when he uses the personification of a dog to describe 'Elaīsh's and Nabawiaya's betrayal. He remarks to the Sheikh: "She betrayed me with a worthless fellow of my followers. He used to be at my disposal like a mean dog."

When Noor asks him about the whereabouts of the car he stole from the youth, he replies that "it was wise to get rid of it, they will find it and take it back to its owner, as a government should do when it takes the side of some thieves regardless of others." When Noor advises him to "think of running away" he agrees with her, but he prefers to "wait until the dog closes his eyes."

The meaning of the title and of much of the story emerges in Chapters XII and XVIII. In a dialogue with Noor, still at her apartment, Saeed inquires about the reaction of the people to his crime of murder:

She took off all her clothes except for a transparent gown. He smelled a mixture of powder and sweat. She went on, 'Many people think of you as a hero, but they have no idea about our agony.'

He said simply, 'The large majority of our people neither fear the thieves nor hate them.' Ten minutes passed with them eating barbecued meat. Then he said, 'But they hate the dogs by nature [p. 143].'

In Chapter XVIII, just before he is surrounded by the police, he decides to chase the dogs:

This gun in my pocket will have to be reckoned with. It must win victory over treachery and corruption. For the first time the thief will chase the dogs [p. 174].

Saeed's actions are also compared to those of a dog, but this time such comparison is handled by the omniscient narrator:

He looked around the apartment. No, Noor hadn't come back yet. I wonder, where this woman spent her night? What kept her from coming? Why should he be in this isolated and lonely prison? In spite of his restlessness he was starving. He went to the kitchen where he found, in the dirty dishes, some crumbs of bread, some tiny pieces of meat still sticking to the bones, and some parsley. He greedily finished everything and licked the bones like a dog [p. 161].

On another level, we encounter the real dogs of the police guiding them to Saeed. But if we return to the symbolic level, we will notice that the dogs denote betrayal, 'Elaīsh, Nabawiya, Ra'ūf, authorities and society in general.

Animal, insect, bird, snake and fish imagery are used to convey two kinds of meaning: they either symbolize strength, power, victory, and skill, or hatred, cowardice, fear, deception, betrayal, philandery, conspiracy and other evils. In the opening chapter Saeed's mind is concentrating on venting his wrath upon his enemies, warning them at the same time that in due course, he will "descend upon you like fate . . . Here comes one who can dive like a fish, soar like an eagle, climbs walls like a mouse, and penetrates walls like a bullet." Being helpless and alone against his enemies, Saeed compares himself to a tiger who is waiting patiently to overtake an elephant ('Elaīsh surrounded by his followers). In Chapter IX Noor compares Saeed to a lion, and in Chapter X he wonders how the filthy Nabawiya could "throw

herself to the dog ('Elaīsh), leaving the lion," (Saeed himself).

Recalling how he "was trapped and besieged" by the police Saeed compares them to a "sinister snake" creeping up to take him while he is unaware. After he is released from prison, and on his way to meet 'Elaīsh, he decides to be wise and careful in dealing with his enemies and "aware of those shops and stores from which all eyes are staring at you like frightened mice." After killing the innocent Sh'abān Hussain, he again feels that he must be aware, but this time of his own "reflection in the mirror" because he must start running "from one hole to another like a mouse threatened by poison, cats, and the clubs of the disgusted."

When he goes out of his hideaway at Noor's place "his feeling of being followed and wanted increased," and he feels that he "shared with the mice and the snakes their feelings when they sneak out of their holes." In Chapter I again, Saeed compares the man who tries to call 'Elaīsh's attention to the protagonist's presence in the alley to a beetle, or a coward.

When the detective makes it clear to him that they should discuss only what concerns his daughter, Saeed is frustrated as he wonders, in an interior monologue, about his property and his treacherous wife, Nabawiya. He thinks:

What about my wife and my property, you sick dogs!
Woe to you . . . Woe to you. I really would like to look
you (Nabawiya) in the eyes so that from then on I can
respect the beetle, the scorpion, and the tiny worm. To
hell with the man who succumbs to the lure of a woman
[p. 59].

The donkey symbolizes a bad omen, the bat stands for darkness, loneliness, and isolation, flies denote dirt, and the fox indicates

deception. Monkeys represent rapid movement, and, finally, the cat and the bird indicate deception, conspiracy, and attack.

The Thief and the Dogs is rich with other symbolic meanings connected with objects and action. The axe and the hammer symbolize man's double dealing and deception. The palm tree, a repeated image, symbolizes life, love, hope, and the happiness of the past. The prison, as mentioned earlier, is a symbol of the womb, indicating Saeed Mahrān's rebirth. The uniform stands for the hero's artificial and false identity on emerging from it. The butterfly at the end of Chapter X denotes love, life, and relaxation. "Heat," "dust," the "sunny streets, the honking cars, the pedestrians, the houses and the stores," are symbols of disappointment, frustration, and loss of hope. The desert stands for isolation, clarity, tranquility, and security. While the past denotes happiness, the present is the symbol of misery and betrayal. Also, there is an indirect indication of Saeed's incapability to see or to face reality, and of the impossibility of his finding a spiritual refuge in religion when he insists on sleeping with his face to the wall instead of turning his head to the sky (heaven) as the Sheikh advises him to.

Light and darkness are very important in this work. Throughout the story Saeed's mind is preoccupied with these images, so effectively employed by Mahfouz to symbolize his protagonist's attitudes and mood, and to suggest the psychological state he is undergoing at a given time. Light, represented especially by the sun and the moon, reveal two different states of Saeed's mind.

In the opening chapter, the dusty streets, the honking cars, the houses, the stores and the sunny streets, all collaborate to impose a

state of melancholy, disappointment, and anger on Saeed. The sun symbolizes divinity, comfort, and calmness whenever it is noticed by Saeed while he is at Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaīdī's home. The moonlight symbolizes disappointments at one time, comfort at another.

At the end of Chapter XIII Saeed is disappointed to discover that even Beyāza does not know the whereabouts of Nabawiya and 'Elaīsh, and he has no choice but to free Beyāza. He undergoes a tormented state of agony when he realizes that he "found himself as he started, lonely, in the desert where the moonlight was clear and the trees were swaying." The moonlight also stands for love, comfort, and calmness when the hero recalls his love story and the palm tree where the moon collaborates with nature to add a beautiful and pleasurable touch to the romantic scene.

Through the use of symbolic images of darkness the author succeeds in depicting and reflecting Saeed's agony, despair, and isolation, hinting at the same time that his hero is doomed to fail. After killing his first innocent victim, Saeed feels that nothing will hide his shame like darkness:

Go to the mountain until darkness envelopes the earth.
Avoid light and enjoy darkness. A useless effort you
have made when you killed Sha'bān Hussain [p. 114].

After convincing himself that he has "lost the best of your character through loneliness, darkness and anxiety," the hero starts to meditate on the real nature of his tragedy:

My real tragedy is that in spite of the support of millions
of people I find myself thrown in dark loneliness with
nobody beside me, an impossible loss. . . . [p. 149].

Finally, one of the most striking images of darkness is Saeed's realization at the end of the story, and only when it is too late, that

it is really the end, that he is ambushed, and that there is "no hope or escaping darkness by running into darkness."

The characters in The Thief and the Dogs are divided into three groups:

1. Saeed Mahrān, the main character.
2. The main characters: Nabawiya, Ra'ūf 'Elwān, 'Elaīsh Sidra, Noor, Sheikh, 'Alī al-Jinaidī, and Mu'alim Tarazān.
3. The minor characters: Beyāza, Sanā', the youth, Hasaballah the detective, and Saeed's parents.

There are some other very minor characters in the story, such as the waiter in Tarazān's Cafe, the old Turkish lady, and Sha'bān Hussain. All the characters in the novel are presented in relation only to Saeed's mind and thoughts.

Almost all the characters in the novel are symbolic and each character stands as a type opposing another character. One must remember, however, that all of these symbolic polarities are seen through the stream of consciousness of Saeed Mahrān.

According to himself, Saeed is a victim of a corrupt and unjust society led by such people as Ra'ūf 'Elwān; he is the symbol of the millions who suffer injustice:

By killing me, they are killing millions. I am the dream, the hope, and the ransom of cowards. I am the example, the consolation, and the tears which betray the one who sheds them. To say I am mad must include all of those sympathetic people [pp. 157-58].

Thus, Saeed decides to be judge and hangman at the same time, to stand against society, a struggle in which he fails. The name of the hero in Arabic denotes "happy" or "cheerful," but Saeed Mahrān is the most miserable and unfortunate character in the story, as the Sheikh always calls him, and the name is both ironic and symbolic of the polarity

Saeed perceives in the world.

Ra'ūf 'Elwān represents cultural and intellectual betrayal. As in Saeed's case, Ra'ūf's name is ironic. The words "Ra'ūf" and "'Elwān" mean "merciful" and "high in position." Ra'ūf 'Elwān, the editor of al-Zahrā newspaper, was one of the many dogs and traitors tracking Saeed's trail. Before the betrayal Saeed envisions him as a "country student in rags but with a big heart," "the revolutionary student," the voice of freedom and liberty. When Saeed practices his profession for the first time Ra'ūf protects and encourages him, saying that that was a good way "to relieve the rich people of some of their burdens," and that what he has done was a "legal job, no doubt" about it. But Ra'ūf also advises him that in order to make it a lucrative profession Saeed must remember that "minor thefts are of no importance," that the whole thing "must be organized."

Ra'ūf also taught the hero how "to love books," discussing things with him as if he were his mate and on the same level with him. He not only provides the protagonist with books, but also with "the great names who really deserved to be stolen from." After the betrayal Ra'ūf, the man "who possessed a great mind," changes completely into a monster, the man with no conscience. Ra'ūf is a vulgar brute (although he holds a high position and belongs to the class which Saeed is fighting). To the hero, Ra'ūf hides his brutality behind his position, making sure that on his side he has "all, the law, iron, and fire."

Ra'ūf is a "symbol of the treachery which included 'Elaīsh, Nabawiya, and all the traitors on earth." Saeed is sure that if the judge between him and Ra'ūf "was anyone except the police, I would have guaranteed to punish you in front of all people; they are all on my

side except the real thieves and that is my consolation for the eternal loss."

There is an obvious contrast in the characters of Noor and Nabawiya. Noor is the opposite of Nabawiya, both physically and spiritually. Noor, whose name indicates "light," stands for love, the light in Saeed's darkness, refuge to the hero, honesty and loyalty. Nabawiya, on the other hand, symbolizes betrayal and philandery. At the beginning of the story the hero views Nabawiya as a woman "full of youth and activity," while Noor is "staggering towards the end." All she needs is "one blow" and she "will be off;" he detests Nabawiya while he feels sorry for Noor. The reader never meets Nabawiya, even though she contaminates Saeed's thoughts all the time. When he refers to her he usually uses the third person pronoun "she," as in "she said," "but she replied," "I told her," or he simply refers to her as "the woman," "the mother of my daughter," etc. Before the betrayal Nabawiya's image was always that of a beautiful lady who "always used to look tidy, with her hair combed, her braids unfolding down to the waist . . . The vitality of her beautiful body showed under her clean dress . . ." To Saeed, Nabawiya was a portrait of "politeness, beauty and tenderness."

But after her treachery Nabawiya became "that woman who blossomed in a rotten soil named treason," of whom "filth is part of her nature," a "coward," a "traitor" who "will be killed by her own will to survive" and a woman whose photograph in al-Zahrā' newspaper "looks like a fallen woman." Thus, with this new image of Nabawiya in Saeed's mind the more he thinks of her the more he wants to kill her at any cost. To him she will always be the "coward," "the traitor who will be killed by her own

will to survive," who will always live in fear until Saeed is dead. At the end, after he loses Noor, Saeed admits that he loves Noor dearly and that by losing her he will lose "sympathy, love and human kindness." But his image of Nabawiya never changes.

Noor is the only adult female with whom Saeed feels happy and secure. Maḥfouz portrays Noor as a whore who possesses a noble character and whose deep devotion to Saeed never wavers. Throughout the story the reader is aware of her spiritual beauty and honesty. Saeed, on the other hand, does not return her love, though he appreciates her feelings for him. While waiting for Noor to appear at the Cafe, Saeed reveals his feelings toward her in an interior monologue:

So let her come so that you can see how was it going with her. She hopelessly tried to get your love. Your heart which was completely owned by the traitor. There is nothing harder for a heart than to wish the love of an impenetrable heart; it is the same as when the nightingale talks to a stone, or as when the breath of air tickles a solid piece of iron. He even used to give her gifts to Nabawiya 'Elaish [p. 95].

When Noor tries to show Saeed how much he really means to her he takes her remarks sarcastically:

'Do you know how sad I was when you went to jail?'
'How sad?'
With some anger, "When do you stop being sarcastic?"
'But I'm very serious just as I'm sure of your truthful heart!'
'But you have no heart!'
'They kept my heart in jail, as instructed.'
'You went to jail with no heart.'
Why the insistence on this talk of hearts? Ask her, the traitor, ask the dogs and ask the girl who denied me [pp. 100-101].

When she reminds him of how much she loves him and how rough he was with her in the past, he simply replies that he "did not have time for love." In spite of the fact that Saeed's heart is "made of stone" as

Noor believes, her love never ceases. But Saeed only feels sorry for her. He says in an interior monologue:

Poor Noor! Her old love for you is only a bad habit, and it hits a heart crushed by pain and anger, a heart that rejects her approaches as it rejects her wornout body, a heart which does not really know what to do with her except to drink with her and to feel sorry for her [p. 126].

As the plot unfolds, Saeed changes toward Noor and develops gradually until he admits, at the end, that he loves her:

Noor is there. Where has she been? He will know the reasons of her disappearance. She came back! . . . The sadness of desperation will soon vanish for something and maybe forever, and he will take her in his arms and will admit his love . . . I love you Noor, I love you with all my heart. Mine is a much greater love than yours. In your arms I will bury my loss -- the betrayal of the rascals and the rejection of my daughter [p. 171].

But it is too late for him to do anything at all because Noor is gone for good.

Although she is a whore, Noor is more intelligent and wiser than Saeed. She tells him that "if we want to live we have to be afraid of nothing. . . . I forget even death when I meet the one I love." When he asks her "who could judge what tomorrow will bring," she simply says, "Our work." Noor, tortured by Saeed, finally begs him to kill her out of mercy:

By Allāh have mercy on me and kill me. . . . You are thinking of murder not of escaping and you are going to be killed. Do you think that you are going to defeat the authorities with their soldiers in the streets in great numbers? . . . Everything is over. Please kill me to end my torture [p. 158].

Noor found no other alternative to her misery but to believe in and wish for what the fortune-teller has foretold her about her "rosy future." But she is disappointed even in the fortune-teller; she asks Saeed:

Do you believe a fortune-teller? Where is security?
I want a safe quiet life. Is that difficult for God, who
put the skies in place [p. 138].

The reader never finds out if Noor gets her wish for a "safe quiet life" fulfilled. She disappears mysteriously, leaving Saeed to his loneliness, the darkness, and the dogs.

There are also polarities in the characters of 'Elaīsh and Tarazān. 'Elaīsh stands for betrayal and cowardice, while Tarazān symbolizes honesty, sincerity, and good manners. Throughout the story the images of these characters never change; once a traitor, 'Elaīsh will always be one.

Before the betrayal 'Elaīsh was a "collector of cigarette butts." He "was nothing but an insignificant person." At Saeed's wedding 'Elaīsh looked so happy that everyone thought that he was the "organizer of the wedding." As Saeed envisioned him afterwards "Elaīsh only played the "role of the honest godfather, but he was not a friend . . . I was the hero, and the hero's worshipper loved me and tried to avoid my fury. He used to pick up my leftovers. 'Elaīsh was nothing but a "traitor," a "coward," a "dog," and a "snake."

One must take into consideration the fact that neither Nabawiya nor 'Elaīsh is shown to express any feelings of guilt. They are presented exclusively from Saeed's point of view (although 'Elaīsh, as seen in the first chapter, seems to be satisfied with what he has accomplished). Dr. Fātma Mūssā is right when she indicates that one cannot even be sure if such betrayal has really occurred in the first place.⁴³

⁴³Mūssā, Between Two Literatures, p. 133.

Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī is not to be compared to any other character; he lives in his own spiritual world. He symbolizes the metaphysical world, love, and refuge for Saeed, who likes and respects him until the end. Represented in The Thief and the Dogs by Sheikh Alī al-Jinaidī, one discovers a spiritual world, a life which can only be comprehended and appreciated by those who actually live in it. Haunted by the "dogs," loneliness, and disappointment, Saeed turns his face to religion, hoping to come upon truth or meaning, but it does not take him long to realize that spiritual comfort and security cannot be found in the Sheikh's peculiar and puzzling world, and that his house "is not secure," although Sheikh Alī is "security itself." Mahfouz here is emphasizing the fact that in pursuing "truth" one must turn to reality, not mysticism.⁴⁴ In other words, the only valid truth, Mahfouz suggests, exists in our hearts, and in order to discover it, Saeed, and all men, must explore the inner world of oneself.

Sheikh 'Alī tries to tell Saeed that he is seeking truth and peace of mind in the wrong places, that in order for him to find what he is pursuing, Saeed must believe in God, that he must not turn from faith for the sake of pursuing temporary goals. When Saeed tells Sheikh Alī that he is homeless and that the Sheikh's home is the only shelter he can find, the Sheikh simply replies, "You mean the walls, not the heart." Saeed says to the Sheikh:

'I told myself that if he is still alive I will no doubt find his door open to everybody.'

To this the Sheikh quietly replies, 'How about the door of Heaven? How did you find it?'

'But I can't find a place on earth, even my daughter denied me.'

⁴⁴Sabri Hāfiz, see pp. 119 and 126.

'How you both look alike!'

'How, Master?'

'You seek a shelter not an answer [p. 68].'

The Sheikh implies that Saeed is like his daughter, she denies him and he denies God, and consequently, they both will find no answers "on earth."

There is a lack of communication between the Sheikh and the hero. The Sheikh rarely speaks, and when he does, his answers to Saeed's questions and inquiries are always brief and ambiguous. He expects Saeed to attain reality and religious comfort through immediate intuition and meditation. Sheikh 'Alī offers Saeed safety, peace of mind, and religious comfort, but he is unable to solve his problems. The only way for the Sheikh to fathom such problems is by advising Saeed to "Wash and read the Qur'ān," to "settle down," to try to "achieve peace of mind and accept the judgement," to save himself if he is willing to, and, above all, to turn his face to God if he really needs spiritual comfort. But the Sheikh's advice falls on deaf ears; he would rather sleep with his "face to the wall than to turn it elsewhere."

The Sheikh asked, after hearing a sigh, 'When do we achieve peace of mind and accept the judgment?'

Saeed answered, 'When the judgment is just.'

'He is always just.'

Saeed moved his head angrily and murmured. 'Unfortunately, the rascals have escaped, how bad!' The Sheikh smiled but did not say a word.

Then Saeed said in a new tone of voice, to change the subject, 'I will sleep with my face to the wall, I don't want to be seen by any of your disciples. I am taking refuge at your place; protect me!'

. . . . Suddenly the Sheikh murmured sadly, 'I have asked you to turn your head up to the sky, but here, you prefer to bury your face in the wall.'

'But don't you remember anything about what I've just told you about the rascals?'

'And call thy Lord to mind when thou forgettest . . .'
said the Sheikh [pp. 167-68].

Thus, Saeed, deeply immersed in crime finds no way out of his problems in religion. To him the Sheikh is a very hard riddle to solve, and his answers to Saeed's questions are as puzzling as the Sheikh himself. In fact, what Saeed wants from Sheikh Alī al-Jinaidī is simply some concrete and logical answers and advice to his inquiries. But when he realizes the difficulty of achieving what he is seeking in religion, the hero decides to desert the Sheikh's home and to find himself another secure shelter until he can avenge himself against his enemies and then to escape:

The Sheikh will always find what to say, and your house,
Master, is not secure although you are security itself;
I have to escape whatever it might cost me [p. 168].

Saeed's failure to find his identity in religion is because he is, as the Sheikh once pointed out to him, "unaware of things."

'You have slept for a long time but you can't settle down; just like an infant under the burning sun, unable to walk, yearning for the shade. Have you learned how to walk yet?'

Saeed said as he rubbed his bloodshot eyes, 'It's so disturbing to be seen asleep.'

The Sheikh said reluctantly, 'When you are unaware of things, things are unaware of you [p. 111].'

Saeed will never learn how to walk unless he starts to look at things as they really are and to learn how to be aware of reality. How can an infant find his identity!

Sanā' is the only character in the novel whom Saeed loves dearly. "Sanā'," in Arabic, means "light." She stands for love, innocence, purity, light, and beauty in the protagonist's life.

Finally, "the youth" represents that class which Saeed hates, the rich. He feels that that class prevented his enrolling at the University. "The youth" represents irresponsibility, greed, and lust.

Naguib Mahfouz did not set out to write an account of an actual true murderer's story, although he used the character of Sulimān to serve his own purposes; his intention was to write the story of a man in search of his identity. He endowed Saeed's character with dimensions which made him different from his real-life prototype Mahmūd Amīn Sulimān. Those dimensions may well be categorized as the cultural dimension, as represented in Saeed's relation with Ra'ūf 'Elwān, and the religious dimension, as illustrated in the protagonist's relation with Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī. Naguib Mahfouz turned Saeed Mahrān into everyman trying to find meaning in a world of chaos. But in his attempts to impose meaning on a chaotic existence, Saeed's bullets ironically miss their target and lead to further chaos.

Saeed Mahrān possesses most of the characteristics which made him eligible to be considered a tragic hero. He suffers from a hamartia, a tragic flaw; his fortune changes from good to bad and his downfall is tragic, arousing fear and pity in the reader. His tragic flaw is his determination to avenge himself against betrayal, his rashness, his poor judgement on situations or circumstances, and, above all, by his hubris, or self-assumed superiority and self-confidence. All these elements express themselves through his failure to fulfill his ambition of revenge, and therefore, result in his tragic downfall.

When Saeed meets Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī for the first time after he has just been released from prison, the omniscient narrator says:

The wilderness outside resounded with the braying of a donkey, ending with a harsh sound like crying. An ugly voice sang 'where is my luck, where is my fortune [p. 69].'

The reader is at this point made aware that Saeed's life and fate are both centered on the meaning of the words "luck" and "fortune" and that

he is doomed to fail sooner or later. The confusion of his mind, his choked emotions, and his continuous pleading for justice all arouse and evoke sympathetic responses from the reader. One feels sorry for him because he suffers. Dr. Fātma Mūssā remarks that the reader cannot offer Saeed his sympathy because the hero is depicted by the author as being a detestable character. In her article entitled "al-Liss wa'l-Kilāb Bain al-Funn wa 'l-Wāqi" ("The Thief and the Dogs: Between Reality and Fiction"). Dr. Mūssā states:

We do not mean here that the author is pushing the reader to sympathize with Saeed, his hero, . . . Saeed Mahrān is a detestable character. . . . We might comprehend him as well as we may realize and grasp the motives which lead to his downfall, but still, we cannot sympathize with him.⁴⁵

Saeed, however, is not presented as wholly detestable. He is capable of love and human feelings even after committing his first murder:

A useless effort you have made when you killed Sha'bān Hussain. Who are you Sha'bān, anyway? I don't know you and you don't know me. Do you have children? Did it ever cross your mind that one day you would be killed by someone you didn't know? Did it ever cross your mind that one day you will be needlessly killed just because Nabawiya Suliman has married 'Elaīsh Sidrah? And to be killed by mistake while 'Elaīsh, Nabawiya or Ra'ūf are still alive. And me, the murderer, doesn't understand anything. I wanted to solve part of the riddle, only to be confronted with a more mysterious one [p. 114].

Even after his second murder Saeed exhibits deep feelings:

I have not killed Ra'ūf, 'Elwān's servant; how could I kill a man I don't know and who doesn't know me? If Ra'ūf 'Elwān's servant was killed, it is because he was Ra'ūf 'Elwān's servant; as simple as that. Last night his ghost visited me and I was ashamed to show myself to him, but he told me that there are millions who kill others by mistake and for no reason [p. 157].

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 135-6.

Saeed's humanity is also shown in his profound love for Sanā', "The thorn which is planted" in his heart, and is sparing Nabawiya's life for the sake of their daughter.

To kill Nabawiya and 'Elaīsh together is the peak of success. Moreover, the most successful thing is to get it over with, to kill Ra'ūf 'Elwān, then the big runaway, to escape abroad if possible. But who will take care of Sanā'? The thorn which is planted in my heart. You follow your impulse not your mind. You have to wait very long, set a plan for your action and then attack like an eagle. It is no use to wait now, because you are pursued. Yes, you are, since it is known that you have been released from prison, and the search will be increased after the car incident, although the wallet of the factory owner's son contains only a few pounds; this is also bad luck. If you do not strike fast soon everything will collapse. But who will take care of Sanā'? The thorn which is planted in my heart, my beloved daughter, in spite of her denial of me. Should I forget all about your mother just for your own sake? I want an answer right now [p. 103].

Another example of Saeed's humanity is seen in his treatment of Beyāza after he attacked him in the desert. He can take all of Beyāza's money, but decides ten pounds is enough for him, especially when he realizes that Beyāza needs his money to support his family.

Throughout the novel Saeed is depicted as helpless to face or to change his fate as he stands aghast, alienated and alone against the whole society in his efforts to regain his pride and honor. Although the past symbolizes his lost dreams and happiness, such happiness never lasts more than a few moments. The paradise becomes hell every moment he recalls one of his enemies, or even the word betrayal; the whole thing becomes a nightmare turning Saeed into a devilish hate-filled person whose only aim is to hunt down and destroy all the traitors.

He endures almost incredible self-punishment, with boredom, restlessness, loneliness, and despair, but never feels fear. With mounting irritation he spends his time in the darkness of Noor's place.

Sometimes he goes out to seek the companionship of Mu'alim Tarazān, or to walk along the Nile or in the desert, but more and more he retreats to his own shell of darkness and boring quietness. Saeed feels a growing disillusionment with the world of traitors around him; "the whole world is unjust" and brutal to him as he envisions it.

Having reached a dangerous state of intoxication with self-pride, Saeed thinks himself superior to everyone:

He really does not like loneliness. And he, among people, grows bigger and bigger, like a giant, practicing love, leadership, and heroism. Without this he cannot enjoy life [p. 162].

In his stream of consciousness he believes that he:

. . . always wished to destroy the whole world and turn it upside down, even when you were just a clown. Your victorious raids, on the palaces used to intoxicate your proud head. And Ra'ūf's fake words which you believed, turned your head [pp. 155-56].

Even after his murders he remains confident he will destroy his enemies, but he is not aware that he is a prey to his own ego:

But what is the meaning of your life if you don't punish your enemies? There is no power in the world that could stand between you and revenge. The dogs! That's right, no power, whatsoever [p. 141].

His hubris is at its highest level when he addresses his imaginary judges, pointing out that:

By killing me, they are killing millions. I am the dream, the hope, and the ransom of cowards. I am the example, the consolation, and the tears which betray the one who sheds them. To say I am mad must include all of those sympathetic people, so, examine the reasons for this mad phenomena and then give your judgment, whatever it might be [pp. 157-58].

Thus, he decides to stand alone against everyone, waging his vicious war against all his enemies, ignoring at the same time

Tarazān's advice that he cannot stand against an important man like Ra'ūf, and also not paying any attention to Noor's advice that he is doomed to fail if he thinks that he can fight the whole society by himself. He is so confident in himself that he tells Noor he can run away whenever he wants to:

I will escape when I decide to escape, you'll see . . .
Don't you know who Saeed Mahrān is [p. 140]?

But as the plot unfolds, Saeed Mahrān is no longer capable of love or other human feelings; he is filled with his determination to avenge himself against his enemies:

Is it possible that I could go through my life with no past and pretend to forget Nabawiya, 'Elaīsh, and Ra'ūf? If I could, I would be more relieved, more comfortable, and farther away from the gallows. But that's no way; life isn't worth living until I do what I have to do. I will never forget the past, for the simple reason that it is the present to me [p. 85].

Saeed's major epiphany occurs at the end of Chapter XVIII as he stands among the graves just across from Noor's apartment. He suddenly realizes what he really is for the first time: he is nothing, he is lost after losing Noor and Tarazān. But he knows what he must do, he will fight and die if there is no other way out. But "there is no other way but to surrender" to death. Therefore he "surrendered indifferently . . . indifferently," His tragedy is that he belonged nowhere; he is incapable of choosing either religion or the cultural-materialistic world to be the road he must take in order to find his identity.

The Thief and the Dogs: Documentation

Circumstances of Writing

In Writing The Thief and the Dogs, Naguib Mahfouz was inspired by the true story of Mahmūd Amīn Sulīmān, well known as "the Sniper of Alexandria," and about whose murderous actions the papers wrote and the people talked for a long time, even after his death. Actually, the newspapers made a hero of him, a type of superman capable of doing the incredible.⁴⁶

One can find many similarities between Saeed Mahrān and the Sniper, but such similarities are vague and trivial; they do not extend beyond the surface to the depth of the personality. Both shared the same publicity in the papers, although Mahfouz' concentration was not on such publicity as much as it was on the effect of the press upon Saeed himself. Saeed and Sulīmān share the mistake of leaving some of their clothes behind, which makes it easier for the police dogs to follow their trail. Sulīmān is also killed by the police, who trap him in a mountain cave where he hides himself, as Saeed is trapped by the police in the cemetery. Sulīmān believed that his wife was betraying him and that she therefore must be punished (this is a possible reason for some of the public sympathy he aroused), but one cannot be sure whether or not Sulīmān was certain about his wife's adultery.

In Saeed's case Nabawiya's betrayal is a fact; his imprisonment was her excuse to ask for a divorce so that she could marry his disciple, 'Elaīsh Sidra.

⁴⁶Ibid., see pp. 132-37.

Another interesting parallel is found in Sulimān's relation with his lawyer and Saeed's with Ra'ūf 'Elwān. Sulimān's attorney would do anything he could to save the sniper's life, not because he liked him or because he was loyal to him, but because he was trying to save his own life. In Saeed's case, the relationship between him and Ra'ūf 'Elwān, who was a law school graduate, is deeper in meaning and dimension, a close friendship between master and disciple, teacher and thief.

Summary and Conclusion

Although the English novel, as tradition, is older and more advanced than the Arabic novel, the latter has rapidly progressed towards the same qualitative standards. The Arabic novel began by simply translating the masterpiece novels of Western civilization into Arabic, and later used the idiom of Western criticism in appraising and analyzing modern Arabic literature, as represented in the work of Naguib Mahfouz, starting with The Thief and the Dogs, 1961.

The Arabic novel before The Thief and the Dogs had a tendency to concentrate mainly on the external description of characters and events. Little attention was paid to characters' inner experience.

Therefore, Mahfouz' novel marks a turning point in Arabic literature in that the author succeeded in utilizing for the first time in Arabic the stream of consciousness and other Western literary techniques. Mahfouz handles them with great artistic skill, proving that he is one of the few innovators of the Arabic novel and the leading literary figure of the Arab world.

CHAPTER II

TRANSLATION - THE THIEF AND THE DOGS

Chapter I

Once more he breathes the air of freedom even if the weather is terribly dusty and hot. Except for his blue clothes and tennis shoes there is nothing and no one waiting for him. But that doesn't matter any more. The world is coming back and the solid prison gates are fading away, keeping within all sorts of desperate secrets. Straight ahead are the streets heavy with the sun, the honking cars, the pedestrains, the houses, and the stores. Yet there is no smile on his face. He is a person who lost a great deal, including four valuable years of his life. Soon he will stand before all of them and challenge them. It is time for his anger and hatred to burst and to burn; it is time for the traitors to be scared to death; it is time for treachery to pay for its ugly and horrible face . . . Nabawiya, 'Elaīsh . . . how could the two names become one!

Both of you are worried about this day of retribution. You believed that the prison gates would remain shut forever. You are carefully watching this day. I will not fall into your trap, but will, in due course, descend upon you like fate. Sanā': when she comes to my mind, heat, dust, hatred, anger, and depression vanish and are replaced by pure love, as pure as the air after a rain storm.

What does the sweet little one know about her father? Not a thing, like the road, the passerby, and this inferno. She has never been away from his thoughts for the past four long years. She has been gradually and mysteriously developing and growing up into a mysterious picture in his mind. Would fate provide a good and pleasant place to exchange love, and enjoy the bliss of victory once treachery is no more than a stinking memory. Resort to all the cunning you possess and let your blow be equal to your long patience all those years behind the prison walls.

Here comes one who can dive like a fish, soar like an eagle, climbs walls like a mouse, and penetrates walls like a bullet. I wonder with what face will he meet you. How would the eyes meet? 'Elaīsh, have you forgotten how you used to lick my feet like a servile dog? Didn't I teach you how to stand on your feet? Have you forgotten who made a man out of a collector of cigarette butts? It is not you alone who has forgotten all this 'Elaīsh; she has forgotten too. That woman who blossomed in a rotten soil named treachery. In the midst of all this misery only one thing smiles, Sanā's face. Soon I am going to find out whether I will have the good luck to see you. When I cross this street with its old, gloomy arches where saloons once prospered, I swear I hate you. All the taverns are now closed; what remains are the narrow alleys in which conspiracies are planned.

The feet enter now and then cross over a hole in the pavement set there like a conspiracy, the wheels of the street cars giggle like mocking insults, and the varied cries of street vendors mix in the air as if they came from rotten vegetables. I swear I hate you.

The windows of the houses are inviting even when empty, and the walls are frowning. In this strange alley, al-Sirafī Alley, the dark memory where a thief committed his theft and disappeared as quick as a blink of an eye. Woe to the traitors. Here in this very same alley I was trapped. They moved in like a sinister snake to take me unaware. Yet a year before, it came out of the same alley carrying flour for the al-'Eīd¹ cakes, and the other ahead of me, carrying Sanā'. Those happy days, no one knew how sincere they were, as impressions of al-'Eīd, love, fatherhood, and crime were all then mixed together.

Suddenly, he could see the towering mosques, and in the clear sky high above stood the citadel. The road lead to the square and he could see the green garden under the hot sun. A breath of air blew refreshing in spite of the heat. This was Citadel Square with all its burning memories. He, with his sun drenched face, had to open up, and he had to pour cold water into the inferno deep inside him to look like a peaceful person; he had to play the part he set for himself well. He crossed the square from the center heading to al-Emām Road. He was approaching the three story house situated at the end of the road and the crossing of two alleys. In this innocent corner your enemies will reveal what they have planned for your homecoming. Better prepare yourself; know your road and its positions. There are those shops and stores from which all eyes are staring at you like frightened mice.

Suddenly a voice came from behind, "Saeed Mahran! . . . What a pleasant surprise."

¹The al-'Eīd: An annual feast which Muslims celebrate just after Ramadān, the month of fasting.

Saeed stood still until the other man caught up with him. They shook hands, hiding their real feeling behind pale smiles. Very well, the rogue has followers now. Very soon I will find out what all this reception is about, and maybe at this same moment you, 'Elaīsh, are watching from behind your window like women do.

"Thanks a lot, Mua'lim² Beyāza . . ."

In a minute Beyāza and Saeed were surrounded by many people who came out from the stores and shops on both sides of the alley. The congratulations were getting warmer. Soon he found himself completely surrounded by a hoard of people who, no doubt, were his rivals' friends and followers. Everyone was shouting.

"Thank God for your safety . . ."

"Congratulations to all friends and beloved ones . . ."

"We heartily believed that he would be released on the occasion of the Revolution Day."³

Inspecting everyone carefully with his hazelnut eyes, Saeed said, "Thanks to God, and to all of you . . ."

Beyāza, rubbing his elbow, said: "Come to my store and have some juice!"

But Saeed answered very calmly, "Later, when I come back."

²Mua'lim: As it is used here it means a master, or a man of power and authority among his followers and highly respected among other leaders of mua'limean (plural). Saeed was a mua'lim before he was arrested. The title is carried by 'Elaīsh after he betrays Saeed and takes his position in the alley.

³The Revolution of 1952: The government usually sets some of the well-behaved prisoners free on the occasion of the Revolution. Saeed Mahrān was one of those to benefit from the occasion.

"When you come back?"

Then a man shouted, as he lifted his face up to the second floor of the house: "Master 'Elaīsh, Master 'Elaīsh! Come down and congratulate Saeed Mahrān."

Don't warn him, you beetle, I came here in daylight. I know that you're expecting me and watching my arrival.

Then Beyāza asked again, "You come back from where?"

"I have an account to take care of . . ."

"With whom?" Beyāza asked with an expression of displeasure on his face.

"Have you forgotten that I am a father . . . and that my little child is with 'Elaīsh?"

"Yes, but this is a dispute which the law has to settle."

"It is good to reach an understanding," another said.

A third man said with a tone of peace, "Saeed . . . you have just come out of prison and the wise man is the one who learns."

Trying to cover up his choking anger, Saeed said, "Who claims I am not here to reach an understanding?"

At the second floor a window was opened and through it 'Elaīsh could be seen. Many heads looked to him anxiously. Before another word was said, a tall man with wide shoulders wearing a stripped gallabiah⁴ and official shoes⁵ came out of the house. At once Saeed

⁴Gallabiah: A flowing garment; a dress of both men and women, usually made of different kinds of materials such as silk and cotton.

⁵Official shoes: Heavy boots especially made for and used by the army and the police force.

recognized him as Hasaballah, the police detective.

He put on an air of surprise to see the detective, and said with a tense voice, "What bothers you? I am here only to reach an understanding."

But the detective hurried toward him, inspecting and searching him with great talent and experience looking for anything suspicious in his pockets or mind. While doing that he said, "Shut up, you son of a fox; what do you really want?"

"I came here to reach an understanding over my daughter's future."

"Do you know what understanding means?"

"Very well, for the sake of my daughter . . ."

"Go to the courts."

"I'll go to court when I am desperate."

"Let him in. All of you, please," shouted 'Elaīsh from upstairs.

Gather them around you, you coward. I came here only to test your fortifications! But when your time comes the detective and the walls cannot save you.

They entered the living room where they spread themselves on the various chairs and sofas. The windows were opened and the light and the flies rushed into the room. On the blue carpet one could see black burn spots. 'Elaīsh, resting his fists on a heavy cane kept staring at a large picture hanging from the wall. The detective sat beside Saeed, fidgeting with his rosary.⁶ 'Elaīsh Sidrah finally came in wearing a loose fitting gallabiah, with his round pudgy face straight up with its square chin and big broken nose. He shook hands

⁶Rosary: Chaplet; beads. It is a religious device.

with Saeed, pretending to be courageous, and said, "Thank God for your safety."

Soon there was tense silence; uneasy glances were exchanged. As if he were really planning to forget all about the past, 'Elaīsh said, "Let bygones be bygones; whatever happened happens every day. Regrettable things do take place, and old and close friendships do collapse; but nothing can disgrace a man except shame!"

Saeed followed this with sparkling eyes and his strong lean body like a tiger waiting patiently to grab an elephant. He had nothing to say except to repeat what 'Elaīsh had just said, "Nothing can disgrace a man except shame." Having said so, everyone looked at him and the detective stopped running his rosary through his fingers.

Realizing what was in their minds Saeed said, "I completely agree with you to the letter . . ."

"Stop beating around the bush, please; don't waste any more time," said the detective anxiously.

"Where should we start?" Saeed inquired ironically.

"One matter, only, should be discussed: your daughter!"

What about my wife and my property, you sick dogs! Woe to you . . . Woe to you. I really would like to look you in the eyes so that from then on I can respect the beetle, the scorpion, and the worm. To hell with the man who succumbs to the lure of a woman.

Nevertheless, he had to shake his head to express his agreement. Then, one of the flatterers said, "Your daughter is safely kept by her mother, and according to the law the child must be kept by her mother until she is six years old. But if you wish I could bring her to visit you once a week . . ."

On purpose Saeed raised his voice so that it could be heard by those who were outside the room. "By law it is my right to have her because of the circumstances . . ."

"What do you mean?" asked 'Elaīsh roughly.

But the detective did not give him time to answer, saying, "This discussion will give us nothing but a headache."

"I have not committed any crime whatsoever. It is only what God ordained. It is also my duty. My duty made me do what I have done, and for the sake of the little child," 'Elaīsh said confidently.

Your duty, you son of a bitch, double faced traitor. The hammer, the axe, and the hanging rope. But what does Sanā' look like now?

Saeed replied as calmly as he could, "She needed nothing. She had my money, a lot of it . . ."

"You mean what you have stolen, and which you have denied in court?" said the detective.

"Whatever it is. Tell me, where is it anyway?"

"Not a penny," 'Elaīsh shouted. "Believe me, men, there was nothing, nothing to please an enemy or a friend. The truth is I did my duty . . ."

"Tell me, how could you live so well and spend on others?" Saeed said in a challenging voice.

"Are you my God to try me?" shouted 'Elaīsh.

Then one of the hypocrites said, "Saeed, you had better be wise."

"I know and understand you," said the detective. "I am the best to read your mind. You'll surely destroy yourself. For your own good don't get out of the subject of your daughter."

Saeed retreated with a smile, hiding his eyes by looking at the floor. In a surrendering voice he said, "You are right, Mr. Detective"

"I know you, and I understand you, but I'll go along with you out of respect for these men here--bring in the girl--don't you think it's better to know her opinion first?"

"How is that, Mr. Detective?"

"Saeed, I understand you. You don't really want the girl, and you can't give her a shelter. You can't easily find a place for yourself alone. But it is just and merciful that you see her--bring in the girl."

Bring her mother instead. How anxious are my eyes to meet hers, so I can see one of Hell's secrets. The axe and the hammer.

'Elaish then left the room to bring in the girl. As the sound of feet approached Saeed turned to the door, biting his lower lip; his heart began beating painfully fast. A sudden feeling of anxiety and great love overcame his tornado-like anger.

The little girl with surprise in her eyes appeared with the man. She arrived after a wait which seemed like a thousand years. She was wearing a neat white dress and white slippers which revealed her tiny, dyed toes. She had a brown face and black hair neatly arranged over her forehead. His soul devoured her. She moved her eyes staring into the faces around her in a strange way, and into his face with protest because he was staring hard at her and out of a feeling that she was being pushed towards him to throw herself into his arms. She stopped, dug her feet tightly into the rug, and her body bent backward.

He never moved his eyes away from her. But his heart was broken;

it was so broken that the only feeling left in it was the feeling of being lost, as if she was not his daughter in spite of her hazel eyes, her long face, and her big, wide nose. But where is the so called blood and spiritual relationship? Has it also committed treachery and deception? But in spite of everything, how could he resist the deep urge to embrace her from now until eternity?

"Your father, little one," said the detective carelessly.

"Kiss Daddy," 'Elaīsh said with an expressionless face.

Like a mouse! What is she afraid of! Does she not know how much he really loves her! He gave her his hand. He choked and could not utter a word. He smiled tenderly in a tempting way. But Sanā' said, "No," and would have retreated had it not been for the man behind her. She shouted, "Mommy."

But the man pushed her gently forward and said, "Kiss Daddy."

There was a look of interest and gloating in the eyes of the men. Saeed realized that the prison whipping was not as painful as he had believed it to be.

"Sanā', come here," he said beseechingly. No longer able to put up with her rejection, he stood up halfway and bent his body toward her.

"No!" she shouted.

"I am your Daddy!"

She anxiously raised her eyes to 'Elaīsh Sidrah, and with an insisting voice Saeed said, "It's me, Daddy, come . . ."

The girl refused, and she leaned away. He drew her towards him using some force. She screamed. He embraced her but she pushed him away, crying. Although he was defeated and disappointed, he bent toward her to kiss her lips and her cheek, but his lips could only

reach her nervously moving arm.

"I'm Daddy, don't be afraid, I'm Daddy."

The fragrance of her hair reminded him of her mother and he became nervous. The child's crying and struggling increased.

The detective stopped him, "Take it easy, the girl doesn't know you."

He let go of her, but he was very disappointed. "I will take her," said Saeed furiously.

There was a moment of silence before Beyāza said, "Calm down first."

But Saeed insisted, "She must return to me."

"Let the judge decide that," the detective, strongly interrupted then turning to 'Elaīsh he said with an inquiring tone, "Well?"

"It's none of my business but her mother will never give her up unless the law says so."

"As I said before; there's only one authority, the law court," said the detective. Reminding himself of matters which he had almost forgotten, Saeed managed to control his feelings. He felt that had he let his anger take hold of him he would have lost his sanity.

He said rather calmly, "Yes, the court."

"And the girl, as you see, is very comfortable and very well taken care of," said Beyāza.

"First of all you have to look for a decent way to earn a living," the informer remarked ironically.

In spite of all this he seemed to be able to control himself more and more. "Yes, it's all true, concerning myself, there is nothing to feel sorry for. I will think the whole matter over, and over again,

and no doubt it is better that I forget all about the past, and I have to start looking for a job in order to prepare a good place for the girl when the proper time comes," Saeed said.

Silence and astonishment prevailed and they all looked at each other, with believing and disbelieving eyes. The detective clasped his fist around the rosary and said, "Agreed?"

"Yes, but I want my books," Saeed said.

"Your books!"

"Yes . . ."

"Sanā' has lost most of them, but I will bring you the rest," said 'Elaīsh, who left the room for a moment. When he came back he was carrying a medium sized pile of books which he placed in the middle of the room.

Saeed picked up his books one by one, and kept repeating very regretfully, "It is true, most of them are lost."

Announcing the end of the meeting the detective asked Saeed, "Where did you get all this education from? Were you stealing books along with the other things you stole?"

Everybody smiled, but Saeed took his books and left the room without a smile on his face.

Chapter II

He looked at the open door, the door which was always open as he used to see it a long time ago when he was approaching it from the mountain road. A place of memories and mercy in al-Darrāsah district by the al-Moquatam Hills.

The earth was full of children, sand, and animals, and he was so tired and excited that he kept gasping. His eyes never got tired of following little girls. How many lazy people were lying away from the sunshine under the shade of the hill? He stopped at the step of the open door for a while, looking and remembering. He wondered when the last time was that he crossed this step? What a simple house, as simple as the houses in Adam's time. A large roofless yard, at the left hand corner of which grew a high proud palm tree. No closed doors in this strange lodging.

A pang in his heart returned him to bygone times. It was the time of childhood, sweet dreams, and warm affection of a father-- heavenly images. Singers filled the yard, swaying with religious awe, and the hearts of people resounded with belief in God. Look, listen, and learn, his father used to say. A holy ecstasy was emanated by the dream-like atmosphere that was full of belief, and singing, and the feeling of joy of singing, and of the green tea. I wonder how you are, Sheikh Alī al-Jinaīdī, the best of all living?

He heard a voice, murmuring the end of the prayers, coming from inside the room. Saeed smiled and went through the door carrying his books. There was the Sheikh sitting on the prayer carpet completely absorbed in his prayers. There was hardly any change in the old room. The mats were rejuvenated, thanks to the Sheikh's disciples. The

simple bed still lay by the western wall to the left. A ray of the setting sun overflowed through a small round window in the wall to rest at the Sheikh's feet. Heaps of books covered the lower part of the rest of the walls. The smell of incense filled the room as if it had been there for tens of years.

Saeed laid down the books and approached the Sheikh saying, "Peace, my lord and master!"

The Sheikh finished his prayers and raised his head. His face was thin, but full of life and vitality. He had a white beard which was like a halo enveloping his face. A white cap was pressed over his silver hair. He looked at Saeed with eyes that had seen eighty years of his world and the other. His eyes never lost their charm, penetration, and magic. Before such eyes Saeed was powerless. He could not help but kiss his hand, passionately wiping away a tear which was evoked by the atmosphere of memories, his father, the hope of a distant past.

"Peace, my child," replied the Sheikh. That was the voice of a distant past.

He wondered what his father's voice was like. It was as if he was remembering his father's very voice, with his lips moving. But suddenly the voice stopped.

"Where are the followers at your door, master?" He squatted before the Sheikh on the stray mat.

"Sit down without permission, I remember that you like to do that," said the Sheikh.

He felt that the Sheikh smiled though his white lips never parted. Had he remembered him? He then said, "Excuse me, but I have no place

in the world except your home."

The Sheikh's head fell down on his chest as he whispered, "You mean the walls, not the heart."

Saeed took a deep breath, and for a moment it was as if he understood nothing of what the Sheikh had just said, but he replied truthfully and carelessly, "I've just been released from prison, today."

The Sheikh closed his eyes and asked with some astonishment, "Prison?"

"Yes, you have not seen me for more than ten years; strange things have happened. You might have heard about them from some of your disciples who know me."

"Because I hear too much I hear almost nothing."

"Anyway, I don't like to meet you under false pretenses and that is why I'm telling you that I have just been set free today."

Opening his eyes, the Sheikh swayed his head slowly in sadness, "You are not out of prison."

Saeed smiled. The same old ambiguous words were being repeated once more. "You see master, all prisons are nothing compared to the government's prison," said Saeed.

Looking at him lucidly the Sheikh murmured, "He says that all kinds of prisons are nothing compared to the government's prison."

Saeed smiled again. About to give up any possibility of communication, he asked rather passionately, "Do you remember me?"

The Sheikh murmured indifferently, "Only the present counts."

Although Saeed was sure that he remembered him, he inquired to assure himself, "And my father Mahrān, God bless his soul?"

"God bless all our souls."

"Those were the days."

"I wish you could say the same about the present."

"But . . ."

"God bless our souls."

"I said I just got out of prison today."

The Sheikh swayed his head with sudden pleasure. "Smiling, he said while he was at the stake,⁷ 'It was God's will that you meet him that way.'"

My father was able to understand you. You have avoided me until I thought that you were trying to get rid of me. With my own free will I came back to the atmosphere of incense and to anxiety. That's what the homeless and the deserted do. He went on, "Master I have come to you at a time when my own daughter has denied me."

The Sheikh sighed, "The weakest bear the word of God."

"I told myself that if he is still alive I will no doubt find his door open to everybody," said Saeed seriously.

To this the Sheikh quietly replied, "How about the door of Heaven? How did you find it?"

"But I can't find a place on earth, even my daughter denied me."

"How you both look alike!"

"How, Master?"

"You seek a shelter not an answer."

Saeed leaned his head, with its curly hair, on his dark veined hand. He said, "My father used to come to you in times of hardship, I found myself . . ."

⁷At the stake: To put to death by sitting on a stake, to impale.

The Sheikh interrupted calmly, "You only seek a home, nothing else."

He felt deeply that he recognized him. He was disturbed for no reason at all. "Not only a home, it's more than that, I would like to cry out, God be satisfied with me."

The Sheikh murmured. "The heavenly woman said 'Are not you ashamed to seek the satisfaction of Him with Whom you are not satisfied?'"

The wilderness outside resounded with the braying of a donkey, ending with a harsh sound like crying. An ugly voice sang, "Where is my luck, where is my fortune?"

One day his father caught him singing "Guess to Solve the Riddle." He dealt him a light blow saying, "Is this an appropriate song while we are on our way to the good Sheikh?"

The father was much taken by the Sheikh. His eyes were dimly closed, his voice was not clear, and he was sweating. Saeed sat by a palm tree, looking at the Sheikh's disciples sitting under the lantern light. He was biting a dried fig, enjoying a strange feeling of happiness. That was before he fell in love. The Sheikh closed his eyes as if he were asleep. Saeed got used to the atmosphere and to the scene; he couldn't even smell the incense.

Suddenly, an idea occurred to him: habit is the basis of laziness, dullness, and death. Habit was responsible for the treason, denial, and waste of life that he suffered.

He inquired to wake up the Sheikh, "Are Sūfī⁸ rituals still being

⁸Sūfī, or Sūffiah (n.): An ascetic sect always consisting of retired and mystical Muslims. The members of this sect usually withdraw to a secluded place to perform their religious rituals.

held in here?" When he found no answer he felt disturbed. He asked again, "Aren't you going to welcome me?"

The Sheikh opened his eyes and answered, "Both the needy and the needed are weak before God."

"But you own this house."

"The owner welcomes you as well as he welcomes everyone, and everything else," said the Sheikh. With sudden happiness, Saeed felt encouraged and smiled. The Sheikh went on, "I'm the owner and the proprietor of nothing."

The sunbeam had moved from the mat to the wall. Saeed said, "At any rate, this house is mine as it was my father's before and as it was everybody's in a hardship. You, Master, deserve all gratitude and are able to do everything."

"'God, you know how weak I am to thank you, so please, thank yourself for me,' that is what some grateful people have once said," said the Sheikh.

Saeed asked hopefully, "I'm really in need of a good word."

Tenderly reproaching him, the Sheikh said, "Don't lie." He bent his bearded face over his chest appearing to think deeply.

Saeed waited patiently as he moved a little bit away to lean his back on one of the bookshelves. He started to look at the good Sheikh, but when he was not able to wait any more he asked him, "Is there anything I could do to help you?"

He paid him no attention at all. The silence continued while Saeed watched a column of ants moving gently in between the stray mat

curves. The Sheikh suddenly broke the silence. "Get the Qur'ān⁹ and read."

"I'm out of prison just today; I haven't washed myself yet."

"Wash and read."

"My daughter denied me. She was afraid of me as if I were the devil. Before that her mother betrayed me," said Saeed complaining.

But the Sheikh said tenderly, "Wash and read."

"She betrayed me with a worthless fellow, one of my followers. He used to be at my disposal like a mean dog. For him she asked for a divorce, using my imprisonment as a pretext and as a means for her deeds. Then, she married him."

"Wash and read."

Saeed insisted. "He took all my money, my money and the jewelry. My money made a Master out of him. Besides, all my men in the alley became his followers."

"Wash and read."

Furious, Saeed's veins showed on his enraged face. "The police were not able to catch me; it's that rascal who sold me out to them. I was sure of my safety until he interfered and made a deal with my wife to sell me out. Then disasters followed each other until finally my daughter denied me."

"Wash and read. Say, 'If ye do love God follow me: God will love thee,' and read, 'And I have prepared thee for Myself; and repeat the saying: 'Love is the agreement which means that you must blindly obey God and follow his words; cease doing what he forbids, and be

⁹Qur'ān: The holy book of revelations made to the Muslims' Prophet Muhammad by God.

satisfied with what he ordained.'"

Here is my father very pleased, listening and shaking his head while he is looking at me, as if to tell me to listen and learn, and I am happy trying to sneak out to climb the palm tree or to throw a stone to get myself a fig. I sing secretly with the group of choristers.

One evening while I was going back home to the student residence, at al-Jīzah,¹⁰ I saw her coming from the other direction, carrying a basket. She was very beautiful. In her body there was Heaven and Hell. What did you like in that religious singing? When she appeared her face was like that of the beloved crescent.

But the sun has not gone yet, you can see the last golden ray of it retreating from the small window. I have a very long evening ahead of me: my first night of freedom. I will be alone with freedom or with the Sheikh preoccupied with Heaven, unconsciously murmuring words I, Saeed, don't know the meaning of, heading toward Hell. But there's no other place for me.

¹⁰al-Jīzah: A large district in Cairo.

Chapter III

He turned the pages of al-Zahra newspaper over and over until he found Mr. Ra'ūf¹¹ 'Elwān's¹² column. He read very eagerly. He was still near Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī's house where he had spent the last night.

But where does Ra'ūf 'Elwān get his inspiration from? Inspirations on ladies' fashions, loud speakers, and a reply to an unknown lady concerning her complaint! Good ideas indeed, but where is Ra'ūf 'Elwān?

The student's house and those strange bygone days. The picture of a country student in rags, but with a big heart showing great enthusiasm. The honest and influential pen! I wonder what happened to the world? What is there behind these miracles and secrets? Is everything that ever happened anywhere in the world similar to what happened in al-Sirafī Alley? The events of Nabawiya and 'Elaīsh, and the little beloved girl who denied her father.

I have to see Ra'ūf 'Elwān. The Sheikh offered me a place to sleep, but I also need some money. Mr. 'Elwān, I have to start a new, fresh life. You are not less great than Sheikh 'Alī, for me you are the most important thing in this insecure world.

He stopped in front of the al Zahra newspaper building, in Education Square. It is a huge building, difficult for any thief to break into, especially with the line of cars surrounding the building

¹¹Ra'ūf: Merciful, or tender.

¹²'Elwān: High level; superiority.

like horrible prison guards.

The noise of the printing presses in the basement sounded like the snoring of the prisoners in their cells. He went into the building with waves of other men and women. He stopped in front of the information counter. He asked roughly, "Mr. Ra'ūf 'Elwān?"

The man looked at him furiously for his rudeness and replied, "Fourth floor."

He went to the elevator and stood in line with a number of people, among whom he looked like an alien with his blue outfit and tennis shoes. His sharp, courageous look and his long, sharp nose added to his strange appearance. When he saw a girl in the line he remembered Nabawiya and 'Elaīsh, and he cursed them, promising to avenge himself. Before one of the clerks could stop him he sneaked into the secretary's room at the end of the lobby on the fourth floor. He found himself in a large triangular room whose glass walls overlooked the street. The room was crowded. He heard the secretary on the phone assuring someone that Mr. Ra'ūf 'Elwān was having a meeting with the Chief Editor and that he would not be back for two hours. Though he stood still, carelessly staring at the faces around him in a rude way, he felt that he was really a stranger. A long, long time ago he used to stare at some other people, just like these people, with furious eyes, wishing to strangle them. Why is he tolerating them now?

But it will not be a good thing for him to meet Ra'ūf here because it is not the proper place for old friends to meet after all this time. Besides, it appears that Ra'ūf is a big man now, very big, just like this room. In the past he was nothing but a sub-editor working for al-Nazeer magazine. Though it was a very small magazine in Muhammad

'Alī Street, it was a sharp and loud voice calling for freedom.

I wonder how you are and what you look like today Ra'ūf? Has he changed like you, Nabawiya? Will he deny me as you did, Sanā'? But why should I be so pessimistic! He will still be a friend, a teacher, and the sharp sword of liberty; he will remain that way in spite of the big position, the strange editorials, and his secretaries. If this castle will deprive me of my right to embrace you, I will no doubt find your home address from the phone book.

He sat on the wet grass by the Nile at al-Nile Street and waited. He waited for a long time near a tree which hid the light of the electric lamp. There was no moon and the stars glittered in the pitch dark night. A gentle night breeze blew after the torrid summer day. He never for a moment took his eyes off villa no. 18. His back was to the Nile and the palms of his hands were clasped around his knees. The house was accessible from four directions, the big garden occupied the fourth street. It was a very old sight, the sight of the shadow of the trees encircling the house. The place was an old, historical one; only rich people could dwell there.

But how could one break in? What is the best means to do it, especially in such a short time? Even thieves do not dream of robbing such a place. How could I dream of being welcomed here today, when even in the past I used to look at these kinds of houses only when I had in mind a plan to rob them? Ra'ūf 'Elwān, you are a riddle, and a riddle must talk and reveal its mystery. Isn't it really a coincidence to find out that 'Elwān rhymes with Mahrān? Isn't it also a strange thing that 'Elaīsh put his hands on my money and on what I have worked for all my life by deceiving me like a dog?

He got up very quickly when he saw a car stopping by the gates of the villa and the doorman pushing the gate wide open. He crossed the road rapidly and stood in front of the car with his body bent forward in order to be seen by the man in the car. The man recognized him in the dark. Saeed called out with a rough voice, "Mr. Ra'ūf-- I'm Saeed Mahrān!"

The man in the car put his head through the car window and said quietly, "Saeed! . . . Oh!"

He could not read the face of Ra'ūf, but he was encouraged when he heard his voice. A tense moment of silence elapsed before the car door was opened, and the same voice was heard ordering, "Get in."

A good start indeed! Ra'ūf 'Elwān was still the same as before, in spite of his great position and his wonderful villa. The car turned to a narrow road that curved sharply to the entrance to the main stairway of the villa.

"Saeed, how are you, man? When did you get out?"

"Yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"Yes, I should've come to you but I was busy with some urgent matters. Besides, I needed some rest and so I spent the night at Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī's; remember him?"

As they were leaving the car and entering the living room Ra'ūf replied with a surprise, "Oh! . . . your late father's Sheikh, I've been to his rituals more than once."

"They were amusing."

"I like those reciters chanting."

When the servant put the light of the chandelier on, Saeed's eyes were dazzled by its shiny lamps, its stars, and its crescents. The corner mirrors reflected the light on the golden pieces which looked like something out of the darkness of history. Everything in the room was luxurious, the decorated ceiling, the beautiful carpets, the comfortable sofas and armchairs, and the pillows thrown on the floor.

Finally in the reflection of the chandelier's light he saw the writer's healthy round face, that face which he loved and knew very well. While the servant was opening a door to the garden Saeed looked at the writer and glanced at the finery in the room stealthily. As the door was opened a scented breeze of fresh air came in from the garden and mixed with the light of the chandelier. Saeed almost became dizzy. His face became swollen like the face of a cow. An unknown impulse inside him made him refrain from talking in spite of the smiles and warm reception he was getting. He felt a magic scent in the air, something he could not identify in spite of his sharp long nose. It was the smell of aristocracy. His heart beat strongly. He was wondering if this last resort would collapse, if he would have nothing else to fall back upon. Ra'ūf sat on a sofa near the terrace. He beckoned to him to sit in a big, comfortable armchair at the corner of a long row of armchairs which ended at a transparent lighted column embroidered with legendary pictures. He did not hesitate to sit down in a casual manner. The writer stretched his long legs as he inquired, "Did you come to see me at the newspaper?"

"Yes, but I was soon convinced that that was not a good place for our meeting."

Ra'ūf's smile revealed his dark teeth, as he said, "The newspaper

building is like a vortex. Have you been waiting for me here for a long time?"

"A whole lifetime!"

Ra'ūf laughed again and said, "No doubt you have been to this district before."

Saeed also laughed and replied, "Of course, here I have known many customers whom I really appreciated, such as Fādīl Pāshā Hassanian's villa, from which I stole one thousand pounds, and the actress Kawākib's villa, from which I obtained a rare diamond earring."

The servant came into the room pushing a wheeled table on which there were two bottles, two glasses, a small pink ice bucket, some applies arranged in a pyramid on a plate, some appetizers, and a silver kettle full of water. The writer nodded at the servant to withdraw and started to fill two glasses, the first of which he gave to Saeed while he raised the other one saying, "To freedom."

Saeed swallowed the contents of his glass very quickly, but Ra'ūf took only a sip and said, "And how is your daughter? And why have you spent your night with Sheikh 'Alī?"

Ra'ūf had forgotten almost everything, but he remembered that he had a daughter. Very coldly and briefly Saeed narrated his tragedy. He ended by saying, "Yesterday I visited al-Sirafī Alley and there, as I expected, my daughter denied me and shouted at me."

Without permission he filled another glass. Ra'ūf said, "It's a sad story. As for your daughter, she is really to be excused--she doesn't remember you; but later she will know you and love you."

"I don't trust her sex any more."

"This is what you feel now, but tomorrow, who knows? You'll

change your mind of your own free will; this is the way of the world."

The phone rang. Ra'ūf took the receiver and listened for a little while after which he smiled with pleasure. He took the phone to the veranda. With his sharp eyes Saeed followed him from place to place; a woman? This smile and this trip in the darkness can only be for a woman. I wonder if he is still single?

There they were, sitting together, drinking and talking, but he had a feeling, a mysterious sense of warning that in the future it would be almost impossible to have another meeting with Ra'ūf. He didn't know the reason for such a feeling, but he believed it, as anyone who depends on his intuition does. Nowadays, Ra'ūf belonged to that class which Saeed used to visit only to steal from. Ra'ūf might have been forced into welcoming him or he might have changed. Maybe nothing remained of the old person except a shadow of his character. Saeed was disappointed when he heard a loud laugh coming back from the terrace. He took an apple and he quietly started to bite into it. His life was nothing but an expansion of the thought of this laughing man on the phone. If he betrayed these thoughts, hell and damnation. Finally, Ra'ūf 'Elwān came back from the terrace and put the telephone on its receiver.

He sat down looking satisfied, "Congratulations on your freedom, it's really a very valuable treasure which should compensate you for whatever was lost." He took a piece of dried meat and shook his head but without paying serious attention, "And here you are out of prison facing a new life."

He filled two glasses while Saeed was eagerly eating the different kinds of food. Saeed looked at his friend, who smiled very quickly to cover his disgust.

You are really mad if you believe that he heartily welcomed you. He is just being politely courteous, and this will soon disappear. All sorts of treason can be allowed except this one. The whole world will be swallowed by emptiness.

Ra'ūf then took a cigarette from his cigarette box, inlaid with Chinese inscriptions. "Saeed, everything is over now; whatever might disturb our lives is gone now."

Saeed replied through a mouthful of food, "We were shaken by the news in jail; who would believe such a thing could've happened?" Then as he looked at him with a smile, "The war is over now!"¹³

"Let it be a truce! Every war has its own field."

Saeed looked around and said, "And this wonderful living room is like a field." Saeed regretted the remark. He noticed a cold look in his friend's eyes.

Can't you hold your tongue! Don't you know what good manners and politeness are!

"What kind of similarity is there between this living room and the field?" asked Ra'ūf with quiet anger.

Saeed avoided the subject, "I mean it is in very good taste."

Ra'ūf was clearly disgusted: "It's useless to beat around the bush. Say directly what you have in mind. I understand you. I can read you very well. You certainly know that!"

Saeed laughed with some kindness, "I did not mean any harm at all!"

"You have to remember always that I live by my hard work."

¹³The war between social classes.

"I've no doubt about that, but by the name of Allāh don't get mad at me."

Ra'ūf smoked his cigarette very nervously and silently until Saeed had to stop eating and say in an apologizing tone, "I've not gotten rid of the jail's atmosphere yet. I need time before I can get my manners and politeness back. Besides, don't forget I'm still dizzy after that strange encounter where I was denied by my own daughter."

To show his forgiveness, Ra'ūf raised his hairy eyebrows, but when he saw his friend's eyes move from him to the food and back again he quietly ordered him, "Eat."

Without any hesitation Saeed continued his attack on the food until he had eaten it all.

In an attempt to end the meeting, Ra'ūf said, "Everything must completely change. Have you thought of the future?"

Lighting a cigarette, Saeed said, "The past has not yet allowed me to think of the future."

"I think that women outnumber men, so don't pay any attention to a woman's betrayal. As for your daughter, I'm sure she is going to know and love you one day. The most important thing now is to look for a job."

Saeed replied while looking at a Chinese statue that appeared so venerable and sleepy, "I've learned to be a tailor in jail."

"Would you like to get yourself a tailor's shop?" asked the writer in surprise.

But Saeed answered very quietly, "Certainly not."

"What then?"

"I have practiced no craft in my life but one."

Very disturbed, Ra'ūf asked, "Are you going to be a thief again?"

"It's a lucrative profession and it pays a lot, as you know."

Ra'ūf shouted, "As I know! How could I know?"

Very surprised Saeed looked at him. "Why are you so angry? I meant to say that you know my past, isn't that right?"

Ra'ūf looked down, as if he were convincing himself of what the former had just said, but it was clear in his face that Ra'ūf would not be as relaxed as he had been before.

He said, as if he wanted to end this conversation, "Saeed, today is not the same as yesterday; you have been a thief and a friend of mine at the same time, for many reasons which were very well known to you. But today is not yesterday; if you become a thief again you are going to be just a thief, nothing more."

He stood up very nervously, facing disappointment in its roughest and most cutting form, but he suppressed his desire with an iron will. He sat down again, this time very quietly. "Find a suitable job for me, then!"

"What kind of a job? Speak up; I'm listening."

He said in unrevealed sarcasm, "I will be delighted to work as a journalist at your journal; I'm educated and a former student of yours. I've read piles and piles of books under your supervision. You've always testified how clever I've been."

Very disturbed, Ra'ūf shook his head. The light was reflected on his deep black hair. "There is no time for joking now. You have never practiced writing for a newspaper. Besides, you were released from jail just yesterday. You are wasting my time."

"Then I have to find a menial job for myself?" he asked sadly.

"There is no menial job as long as it is clean and honest."

Saeed was overcome by bitterness and cared no more after such a disappointment. He moved his eyes rapidly around the luxurious living room and said in a challenging tone, "How beautiful it is when the rich people advise us about poverty."

Ra'ūf's answer was clear enough to Saeed--he looked at his watch. Saeed said politely, "I'm sure I've taken up much of your time, more than I should."

Ra'ūf said bluntly, "Yes, you have, and I am very exhausted."

Saeed stood up, "Thanks a lot for your hospitality, generosity, and good manners."

Ra'ūf took his wallet out of his pocket and gave him a couple of five pound bills. "This is for today until you find something. You have to excuse me if I tell you that I'm really exhausted and that one can rarely find me free as you did tonight."

He took the money and smiled. Then Saeed shook Ra'ūf's hand and told him in a tone full of hope, "May Allāh keep an eye on you."

Chapter IV

That is the naked reality of Ra'ūf Elwān, a rotten unburied corpse. The old Ra'ūf is no more, like yesterday or the first day of the history of Nabawiya's love or 'Elaīsh's loyalty. Don't be deceived by appearances; sweet words are mockery, smiles reveal shrinking lips, and hospitality is an act of self-defense performed by outstretched finger tips. You were not allowed to step into his house except out of courtesy.

You make something out of me and then give me up, you simply change your mind about beliefs which I personified; I find myself lost in the wilderness without hope, value, or roots; mean treason fell on my head like a ton of bricks, never to be forgotten. I wonder, do you admit your treason to yourself, or have you also deceived yourself as you tried to deceive others? Don't you have pangs of conscience as I have penetrated your house of mirrors and antiques. But I'm sure I won't find anything there except treason. I will find Nabawiya in Ra'ūf's clothes, or Ra'ūf in hers, or 'Elaīsh Sidrah in their places, and the treason will reveal itself as the worst sin on earth. Behind my back their eyes exchanged suspicious, uneasy, disturbed looks like the stream of lust carrying them, like a cat crawling on her stomach toward a sleepy bird, in the shape of death. Opportunism overcame the inebriation of shame and hesitation.

'Elaīsh Sidrah, in a corner of an alley or maybe in my house said: "I'll tell the police about his whereabouts, that way we can get rid of him." But the girl's mother kept silent; that tongue was silent. It is the same tongue which used to lavish soft speeches of love on me. That is how I found myself surrounded by the police in al-Sirafī Alley

and was beaten and knocked down. Before that the devil himself was not able to find me. You too, Ra'ūf; I don't know which of you is more of a traitor. But your guilt is more horrible than hers, you who possess a great mind and a great past. Do you lead me to jail as you leap to the palace of lights and mirrors; have you forgotten what you taught me about palaces and cottages? But I don't forget!

He reached 'Abbās Bridge¹⁴ where he sat down on a bench of stone on the river bank. For the first time, he noticed the road. As if he were talking to the darkness, he said loudly, "The sooner the better, now and before he recovers from the surprise!"

Better not hesitate because your craft is yours; it is a good and worthy one especially when you practice it on its philosopher. When I'm done with punishing the rascals I will find plenty of places to hide in this wide world. Is it possible that I could go through my life with no past and pretend to forget Nabawiya, 'Elaīsh, and Ra'ūf? If I could, I would be more relieved, more comfortable, and farther away from the gallows. But that's no way; life isn't worth living until I do what I have to do. I will never forget the past, for the simple reason that it is the present to me. Tonight's adventure will be the best start for my work. It's going to be worth my while.

The Nile ran like waves of darkness, covered with reflected arrows of light from the lamps along the bank, while comfortable and absolute quietness covered everything. Then the stars reached close to the earth as dawn started to break.

¹⁴Abbās Bridge: A bridge named after Khidaiwī 'Abbās, the Turkish ruler in Egypt. The bridge joins two large districts in Cairo, namely al-Jīzah and al-Rōdah. Old Egypt is on the opposite side of al-Rōdah.

He left the bench and stretched his arms. He walked by the bank, toward the place where he had come from a while before. He moved forward carefully, trying to avoid the dim lights which were still shining in the dawn. He slowed down when he saw the empty villa from its three sides. He watched the road sharply, its lands, the walls of the palaces, and the bank. His eyes settled on that palace. The palace seemed to be sleepy, guarded by trees which surrounded it on every side like ghosts.

Treachery has been sleeping in an underserved quietness. It will be a great adventure and a definite answer to the deception of a whole lifetime.

He crossed the road in a casual manner, without even looking around him. Then he walked by the wall of a side street while he examined what was ahead of him very carefully. When he was sure that the coast was clear, he bent over suddenly closer to the wall. He stopped walking when the jasmine and violet flowers hit him. If there was a dog in the palace except the owner himself, it would fill the air with its barking. But there was nothing but quietness.

Beware, Ra'ūf . . . your disciple is coming to relieve you of some worldly goods.

He climbed the wall gracefully, with expert hands like a monkey's. Neither the trees nor their thick branches could stop him from getting into the house. With his hands on the bars of the iron gate he pushed himself upward, depending on his own physical strength. Then, he jumped into the garden and waited among the thick bushes until he was able to breathe normally again. He watched the dark garden, thick with trees and bushes.

You have to climb to the roof and from there you can make your way inside the house. You have neither any tool nor a flashlight. You have no preconceived idea of the place. Nabawiyā did not come before you, as usual, to work there as a maid or washer woman. She is now busy with 'Elaīsh Sidrah.

He frowned to get rid of such ideas. He carefully descended to the garden and crawled on his stomach toward the wall of the villa. He moved around the villa until he found a water pipe, which he climbed like an acrobat. His target was to reach the roof, but he changed his mind when he came across an open window, which he immediately decided to try. He pointed his legs toward that window until they reached its frame. He held steadfastly to the edge of the wall until his whole body rested on the window frame. Finally, he got himself inside a room which he believed to be a kitchen. It was pitch dark, which disturbed him. He tried hard to find his way to a door. He was expecting the darkness to be thicker inside and he was afraid to move, but he had to move on, especially when he dreamed of Ra'ūf's wallet or when he imagined those antiques which he could steal. In the darkness he sneaked through the door with both hands on the wall to keep himself from falling down. After a long time he felt a breath of fresh air blowing on his face. Where does this air come from? He turned with the inclination of the smooth wall. With outstretched arms and groping fingers he proceeded until he could feel the touch of crystal wires. As he touched them, they produced a hissing sound which made him cringe.

It was just a curtain, no doubt; if that was a curtain, then he was close to his target. He then thought of the match box in his pocket, but without reaching for it, he drew the curtain just a little

bit to get into the room and then he put it back without making any noise. He moved a step forward before he knocked down a chair or something standing in his way. He tried to avoid it by following a dim night lamp which he hoped he could get closer to. It was as dark as a nightmare. For a moment he was thinking of using his matches, but before he was able to do such a thing the room was swimming in light that had been turned on by someone unknown to him.

A floodlight overwhelmed him like fate. Unintentionally he closed his eyes and when he opened them there was Ra'ūf 'Elwān only two yards away from him in a long bathrobe in which he looked like a giant, with his hand tightly hidden in his pocket, as if he were hiding a weapon. Saeed thought that Ra'ūf's cold look increased the coldness of his defeated heart.

Ra'ūf's tightly closed lips spelled hatred and hostility. The terrible silence was heavier and bulkier than the prison walls. 'Abu Rabbū, the jailer, could now gloat on him and say, "How quickly you come back!"

A cold metallic voice called from behind his back, "Should we call the police?"

He looked behind his back and saw three of the servants standing still in one line, but Ra'ūf broke the silence, "Get out and wait."

After the door was closed behind them he suddenly realized that it was a wooden door with Arabian decoration, with the top covered with some Qur'ān scripture, or a proverb or old saying written in inlaid coral. He looked back to Ra'ūf to meet his angry look and to listen to his harsh voice.

"It's foolish to try your tricks on me. I understand you as well as if I knew you by heart."

He kept quiet, trying to wake up from the disappointing surprise, although he had a feeling that he was not going to be sent to the same jail from which he had just been released the day before.

"I was waiting for you, ready for you, I've even planned your way up to here. I had hoped I was mistaken, but mistaken I was not!"

Saeed looked under his feet where he saw a plastic mat. Without trying to break his silence, he looked up.

"It's useless, you won't get rid of your meanness and you'll die mean. The best thing for me to do now is to give you up to the police." His eyelids were twitched and his lips were nervously wide open. Ra'ūf sharply asked him, "What are you here for?"

He looked down again; Ra'ūf went on speaking. "You clearly show your hatred. You've forgotten what I have done for you and live only on hatred and envy. I know your way of thinking as well as I know your moves!"

With his voice quiet and with his eyes looking down to the floor Saeed said, "I'm still dizzy since I've left jail."

Ra'ūf interrupted him. "You're a liar. Don't you try to deceive me. You think that I've become one of those rich people I used to attack in my articles, and you decided to deal with me accordingly.

"It isn't that way."

"Then why did you sneak into my house? Why do you want to rob me?"

Saeed hesitated for a moment before he replied. "I don't know. I'm not in the right frame of mind. I know you won't believe me."

"Of course I won't, because you know that you're a liar. My good

words haven't convinced you. You really gave birth to your envy and your pride. Consequently, just as you used to, you moved like madness itself. You'll get what you've been looking for because you'll find yourself in jail once more."

He replied as if in surrender, "Excuse me, I'm still in the mood of the prison and the time before."

"You have no excuse. I can read your mind, I've read every single sentence which came through that mind of yours, and seen your whole conception of me. Now it's time I give you up to the police."

He stretched his hand in a begging gesture. "No."

"No? Don't you deserve it?"

"I do, but please don't."

Ra'ūf said furiously, "If I lay my eyes on you again I will crush you like an insignificant ant."

Saeed was about to find his way out to safety, but Ra'ūf shouted at him, "Give me back the money."

He stopped for a moment and then he took the two five pound notes out of his pocket. Ra'ūf took them and warned him, "Don't show me your face again."

Saeed went back to the Nile bank, not believing that he was safe, but the relief of safety was disturbed by his feeling of defeat. Under the wet dew of dawn he wondered that he could not remember the room he was caught in, nor could he see details in that room or anything but its polished floor. He surrendered himself to the mercy of the wet dawn, trying to console himself with the thought of the two five pound bills. Then, he looked up to the sky and was taken by the brightness of the stars at that time of dawn.

Chapter V

The few men in the Cafe stared at him incredulously. They all stood up together like one man.

"God keep you!"

"By the prophet, it's a lovely surprise."

They all surrounded him, including the Mu'lim, the owner of the Cafe, and his apprentice. They embraced Saeed and kissed his cheeks. Saeed shook their hands one by one, appreciating their feelings and said, "Thank you, Mua'lim Tarazān. Thanks a lot brothers."

"When?"

"The day before yesterday."

"When we heard the al-'Eīd news our hopes were raised."

"Thank God."

"How about the rest of the boys?"

"They are all right. Everything will come off well!"

They exchanged news of the friends until the Mua'lim took him to his own corner and asked the rest of the crowd to go back to their seats. The Cafe was quiet again. Nothing had changed, as if he had left the place only yesterday--the round room, the brass counter, the bamboo chairs, the few well known customers who were dispersed in the corners of the room drinking tea and striking business deals. Through the big window and the door he saw the limitless pitch dark wilderness. Except for some intermittent laugh coming from a distance, everything else was quiet and silent.

A refreshing dry draft, as pure and strong as the desert, blew between the door and the window. The boy waiter gave Saeed his cup of tea. He started to sip the tea before it got cold and leaned toward

the Mua'lim, asking, "How is it going?"

Mua'lim Tarazān dropped his lower lip, as if to show his dissatisfaction. "It's hard to find anybody to depend on nowadays!"

"Why? God forbid!"

"They are as lazy as government employees."

He replied in a mocking tone, "Anyway, to be a lazy one is far better than to be a traitor. Because of a traitor I've been sent to jail, Mua'lim Tarazān."

"Oh, God have mercy!"

With piercing eyes, he inquired, "You mean you haven't heard the news?"

Sadly the Mua'lim shook his head, but he kept quiet. Saeed then whispered. "I need a good gun!"

Without any hesitation Mua'lim Tarazān agreed, "At your disposal."

He patted his shoulder to show his gratitude before he went on, a little embarrassed, "But I don't have . . ."

The Mua'lim then crossed his mouth with his large finger to stop him reproachfully, "You needn't apologize!"

Relieved, Saeed drank his tea and walked up to a window. At the window, he stood upright with his medium tall, thin, strong body. The air blew his jacket open like a sail. He looked into the pitch dark stretch of wilderness. The stars in the clear sky looked like grains of sand. The Cafe seemed an island in a big ocean or a plane in the sky. Down the hill on which the Cafe was built the red ends of cigarettes were moving like stars in the hands of men who were fond of the fresh air and sitting in the darkness. At the west horizon, the

lights of the al-'Abbāsiya¹⁵ sections seemed so far away that one could feel how deeply inside the desert the Cafe was. When he looked down through the window he heard the voices of the men sitting around the hill, the voices of those who came to the desert seeking the fresh air and relaxation. The waiter of the Cafe went down to them with a water pipe on top of which red pieces of burning coal sent flickering flames. Happy laughter in the crowd interrupted the conversation.

A young voice, seemingly enjoying the evening talk, rang out. "If I could only find one place on earth in which one feels secure and relaxed?"

Another challenging voice answered, "This palce. Doesn't one feel secure here, right now?"

"You say now, that is the tragedy."

"Why do we curse anxiety and fear? Won't these keep us from thinking of our future, at the end?"

"Then you are against peace and decency!"

"If you have the noose around your neck, then you naturally fear decency."

"This is a special case that could be solved between you and the hangman."

"You just talk very happily because you're protected by the desert and the darkness, but what is the use of all this as long as you're going to get back to the city anyway?"

"The real tragedy is that our enemy is also our friend at the same time."

¹⁵al-'Abbāsiya: A very large and famous section in Cairo. Maḥfouz, the author was born there. al-'Abbasiya is the setting of most of Maḥfouz' novels and short stories.

"No, the real tragedy is that our friend is our enemy."

"We are cowards, why don't we admit it?"

"Maybe, but how could we have the courage in this age?"

"Courage is courage."

"And death is death."

"Then the darkness and the desert are all in this together."

What talk in the night! What do they mean? But you feel that somehow they are expressing what you feel. Yes, somehow, but very mysteriously, like the secrets of this dark night.

You, too, used to have courage and a heart drunk with enthusiasm. The weapon was to fight the enemy with, not to kill. Behind this hill there were some young people in poor and torn clothes, but with a clear conscience, practicing how to fight. The inhabitant of villa no. 18 was at their head. He was with them, practicing and teaching and giving them wisdom. "Saeed Mahrān, the pistol is more important than the loaf of bread, or the religious Sūfī rituals you used to follow your father to." One night he asked you, "Saeed, what does a youth need in this country?" and then he replied without waiting for your reply, "He needs both a pistol and a book. The pistol will take care of the past, while the book will take care of the future. Practice shooting and read." Laughing at the students' residence, he said, "You stole? Have you really stolen? Bravo! This is a good way to relieve the rich people of some of their burdens; it's a legal job, no doubt. This desert has witnessed your skill and your intelligence. They have said that you are death itself, and that your bullet always knows its way to the target."

He closed his eyes, surrendering himself to the fresh air when he

felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked back and saw Mu'llim Tarazān with the gun in his other hand saying, "God willing, your enemy will suffer!"

Saeed took the gun, looked at it and examined it. He asked, "How much, Mu'llim?"

"A gift."

"No, what I hope for is that you give me time to pay you back."

"How many bullets do you need?"

They went back to al-Mu'llim's corner. When they passed the Cafe's main entrance they heard a sharp female laugh coming from outside. Mu'llim Tarazān laughed and said, "Noor. Don't you remember her?"

Saeed looked at the darkness through the door and saw nothing. He asked, "Does she still come here?"

"Frequently. She will be pleased to see you."

"She got herself someone?"

"Of course, a little boy, the son of the owner of a candy factory."

When they took their seats on the sofa Tarazān called the waiter, "Ask Noor very politely to come here."

So, let her come so that you can see how was it going with her. She hopelessly tried to get your love. Your heart which was completely owned by the traitor. There is nothing harder for a heart than to wish the love of an impenetrable heart; it is the same as when the nightingale talks to a stone, or as when the breath of air tickles a solid piece of iron. He even used to give her gifts to Nabawiya 'Elaīsh

He touched the gun which was still in his pocket and he started biting his lips and grinding his teeth. Then Noor appeared at the door, not expecting the surprise awaiting her. When she saw him she

stood some steps away from him, very surprised. He looked at her casually and smiled. She looked thinner than before, and her face was completely hidden by heavy makeup. Her bare arms and legs extended from a white dress, alluring and enticing. The dress was tight on her unashamed body, spelling desire. Her short hair playfully spread in the air. She went up to him quickly; their hands clasped. She said, "Thank God for your safety." She laughed nervously to hid her embarrassment. Then she sat down between Mu'llim Tarazān and Saeed.

"How are you, Noor?"

Tarazān smiled and answered, "She is as you can see her, light and bright, (Noor and Noor)."¹⁶

The woman said, "I'm fine, and you? Your health is satisfactory, but your eyes? I know you when you're angry."

He smiled and asked, "How?"

"I don't know how to say it, a reddish look, and a warning moving between your lips."

He laughed and then told her sadly, "Your boyfriend will come soon to get you."

She shook her head to remove a lock of hair over her eyes, "He can't make heads or tails of anything."

"Anyway, you have to go with him."

She looked at him cunningly and asked, "Do you want me to bury him in the sand?" Then with some care, "I heard he's quite a catch!"

"Yes, he is. We'll go in his car to the Martyrs' tomb. He's fond of the desert places."

¹⁶Her name means light and she is bright.

She did not miss his look of attention and care when he asked, as if he was talking to himself, "He is fond of deserted places, at the Martyrs' tomb?"

Her eyelids moved and her disturbance increased when their eyes met. She asked reproachfully, "See, you don't think of me!"

He answered almost without paying attention to her tone, "Why? You are very dear to me."

"No, you're thinking of that catch!"

He smiled and said, "He's part of my thinking of you!"

"I'll be lost if I'm discovered. His father is a strong man and his relatives are so many. Do you need money?"

"My need for a car is greater." He stood up as he playfully pinched her cheek.

"Be very casual, nothing of what you feel will happen. You won't be suspected; I'm not a child. Later on we will see each other more often than you can imagine."

Chapter VI

He avoided the road that was close to the barracks and took the desert as a short cut toward the Martyrs' tomb in order to reach it as soon as possible. He knew his way as if he had a compass installed in his mind. He was very familiar with the al-'Abbāsiya desert. He started to look for the hidden car the moment he saw the huge tomb from a distance. He went around the tomb with his eyes wide open in order to find what he was seeking, until he reached its western side curve, where he saw the car's skeleton lying there at some distance, like a ghost. He went toward the car. He doubled over until his head leveled with his knees. He crept toward the car, but he could not hear a thing, only silence frequently interrupted by whispering voices.

A happy heart is about to be terrified, and a time of pleasure is about to be destroyed, but it's not through any fault of yours. Disruption overwhelms us all like the dome of heaven. In the old days Ra'ūf 'Elwān once said that we always mean well, but we lack discipline.

He almost crawled to get nearer and nearer to the car, until he reached the door knob and felt the warm breath of people inside the car. With some power he held the door knob tightly and then he drew the door open shouting, "Don't move!"

Surprised, the two in the car started. He noticed the two heads looking at him terrified, but he waved his hand with the gun and shouted savagely, "Don't move or I'll shoot. Get out."

He heard Noor's voice begging, "For God's sake!"

The other asked in a choked voice, as if it were coming through sand and stones, "What . . . What do you rant, please?"

"Get out."

Noor then threw her body outside the car, catching her clothes in one pile; the youth followed, was trying to get into his trousers. Confused, Saeed did not give him enough time as he pushed the gun close to him. The youth was crying and begging, "Don't, Don't . . . Don't shoot!"

With his rough, commanding voice Saeed said, "The money."

"The coat is inside."

He pushed Noor inside the car, "You get into the car."

It was a hard push that made Noor scream. She repeated, "Please, let me go."

"Get that coat."

He took the coat and threw it back over the boy after taking the wallet. He ordered him, "You've one minute to save your skin."

The boy ran away in the dark like lightning while Saeed threw himself into the car and started the engine. The car moved forward noisily. Noor finished dressing and said, "I was really frightened, as if I were not expecting you."

He replied while the car was going at a terrifying speed, "Have a drink?"

She gave him a bottle from which he took only one sip and gave it back to her. She did the same and said, "Poor boy, he was terrified."

"Don't trouble me about it; I don't like the owners of factories."

She leaned back as she said, significantly, "The truth is that you don't love anybody."

He had no desire to talk with her and so he kept silent. It looked as if the car was going to al-'Abbasiya, so she begged,

"They will see me with you."

He was thinking the same thing, so he took a back road that ends in al-Darrāsah. He slowed down a little before he said, "I went to Tarazān's Cafe to get a gun and to make a deal, if possible, with any of my old friends, the taxi drivers, but look how good luck threw this car my way."

"Don't you see that I'm always useful?"

"Always. You've been wonderful. Why don't you work as an actress?"

"But I was really frightened at first."

"And then?"

"I hope I was convincing so that I won't be suspected."

"He would have to be crazy to suspect anyone."

Her head moved toward him and then she asked him, "Why do you need the gun and the car?"

"They are necessary for my work."

"My God. When were you released from prison?"

"The day before yesterday."

"And you think of such a thing again?"

"Is it easy for you to change your profession?"

She did not answer. She looked at the dark road glittering with car lights. They approached the mountain at the curve. It was a part of the pitch dark night.

"Do you know how sad I was when I knew you went to jail?"

"How sad?"

With some anger, "When do you stop being sarcastic?"

"But I'm very serious, just as I'm sure of your truthful heart."

Why the insistence on this talk of hearts? Ask her, the traitor, ask the dogs and ask the girl who denied me.

"Some day, we'll be lucky enough to find it."

"Where do you intend to spend the night? Does your wife know where you are?"

"I don't think so."

"Are you going to your house?"

"I don't think so, not tonight anyway."

She said hopefully, "Come to my place."

"You live alone?"

"Najm al-Dīn Street, just behind Bāb al-Naṣr Cemetery."

"No number?"

"It's the only house in that street. Beneath it there is a sack cloth agency and behind it is the cemetery."

Saeed laughed and said, "What a splendid location."

She joined him in his laugh. "Nobody knows me in there and I've not been visited there by anyone. You'll be the first man to get into it. My apartment is on the upper floor."

She waited for his reply, but he was busy looking at the road, which got narrower between the mountain and the houses, starting at Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī's house. Then he pulled the car over to the entrance of al-Darrāsah and turned to her, "This is a good spot for you to get out of the car."

"Aren't you coming with me?"

"I'll come later."

"Where do you go at this time of night?"

"Go right now to the police station and tell them what happened, to the letter, as if you had nothing to do with it. Then give them my description, but give them a different description; say white, fat, with a trace of a scar in his right cheek. Tell them that I have kidnapped you, stolen your things, and raped you.

"Raped me?"

In spite of her remark he went on very seriously, "And say that it took place in the Zainhom Desert, and that I have thrown you out of the car and gone away with it."

"Are you really going to come to my place?"

"Yes, this I promise. Are you going to be as good an actress in the police station as you were in it?"

"God willing!"

"So long now." Then he drove away fast.

Chapter VII

To kill Nabawiya and 'Elaīsh together is the peak of success. Moreover, the most successful thing is to get it over with, to kill Ra'ūf 'Elwān. Then the big runaway, to escape abroad if possible. But who will take care of Sanā'? The thorn which is planted in my heart. You follow your impulse, not your mind. You have to wait very long, set a plan for your action, and then attack like an eagle. It is no use to wait now, because you are pursued. Yes, you are, since it is known that you have been released from prison, and the search will be increased after the car incident, although the wallet of the factory owner's son contains only a few pounds; this is also bad luck. If you do not strike fast, soon everything will collapse. But who will take care of Sanā'? The thorn which is planted in my heart, my beloved daughter, in spite of her denial of me. Should I forget all about your mother just for your own sake? I want an answer right now.

In utter darkness he was going around the house which was located on the three alleys leading to Sekkat al-Emām Alley. The car was parked at the end of the road which came from the direction of the castle square. It seemed that nobody had expected him, because the shops and sotres were closed and the road was clear.

At this hour every creature goes to his little place, not expecting anyone to try him, or maybe he is taking precaution; but he, Saeed, will not change his mind, even if Sanā' lives alone for the rest of her life. Treachery is so ugly, Mr. Ra'ūf.

With his hand in his pocket tightly on the gun, he looked at the house's windows.

Treason is ugly, 'Elaīsh. In order for life to be clear and pure one must uproot treason.

He approached the house door with his body close to the wall. He entered and climbed the stairs very carefully. In complete darkness he passed the first floor, the second floor, and the third one.

Here is the door, behind which the meanest intentioned lust surges. But who is going to open it if he knocks at it? Will Nabawiya come? Does the informer hide somewhere in there? Fire is waiting for the criminals, even if he has to force the door open. He has to get to work, to work at once, because it is not for 'Elaīsh Sidrah to breathe even for a whole day while Saeed Mahran is still free.

You will escape safely, as you have done hundreds of times. As you climb the building in seconds and as you jump from the third floor, you will get safely to the ground, and you can fly if you wish. To knock at the door seems a matter of great importance, although it will raise suspicion, especially at this time of the night. Nabawiya will scream until the whole world hears her; the rascals will come and the informer will appear as well. Then break the fanlight down.

That was the idea he had in mind in the car, on his way to the house far away from here. Now he decided to go through with that plan. He took the gun out of his pocket and used it to strike the fanlight through the zigzag iron bars. The glass broke to pieces and spread all over the place, making a loud noise like that of a hoarse scream in the silence of night. He got nearer to the door and pointed his gun into the interior of the house. He waited with a beating heart, his eyes diving into the darkness of the hall. A voice from within

shouted "Who is it?" It was a man's voice, the voice of 'Elaīsh Sidrah. He could distinguish the voice very clearly. A door was opened at the left side and a narrow light came out, illuminating a ghost of a man who was proceeding towards the door. Saeed then pulled the trigger and a bullet went to the target like the scream of a devil. In return, the man screamed and fell to the floor. Nabawiya 'Elaīsh gave a sharp, terrified, scream that asked for help. He shouted at her.

"Your turn will come. There is no escape from me, I'm the devil himself."

He turned back to run away and jumped the steps without paying any attention to them until he reached the basement. He stopped for a moment to listen, and then went rapidly through the door and walked quietly, close to the wall. He heard some windows being opened, voices inquiring, and some mysterious calls. He approached the car parked at the end of the road, opened its door and got in. At this moment he saw a policeman running from the direction of the square toward Sekkal al-Emām Alley. He squatted on the car's floor to hide himself. The policeman continued running toward the direction from which the screams were coming, but Saeed stayed still in his hiding place until he was sure the policeman had gone away. Saeed got up very carefully behind the wheel and drove quietly away without any delay. He drove around the square at normal speed while the noise kept following him. The noise got on his nerves even after it ceased disturbing his ears.

The murderer. There was Ra'ūf 'Elwān, the well-versed traitor who is more important and dangerous than 'Elaīsh. Now you put an end to insignificant lives; while you used to steal valuable objects.

Your turn will come Nabawiya, there is no escape from me. I'm the devil himself. For the sake of Sanā' I spared your life; I'll inflict another kind of punishment upon you, much more severe than death; it is the fear of death, the eternal fear, Nabawiya. You will never taste relaxation and comfort as long as I live.

Still, with no consciousness as to where he was heading, the car ran into Muhammad 'Alī Street.

Now many people will mention and repeat the name of the murder; consequently the murderer has to disappear, and he has to avoid, as much as he can, the noose around his neck. Don't give 'Eshmāwī¹⁷ the chance to ask you: "What do you want before you die?" The government must be generous to ask such a question in a better occasion.

He woke up to realize that the car was crossing the last quarter of al-Jaish Street, towards al-'Abbāsiya. It disturbed him to find himself getting back to the danger spot. He speeded up until he approached Manshiyat al-Bakrī, where he stopped by the first detour in the main street. He left the car there quietly, without even looking right or left. He walked very slowly, as if he were promenading, then he felt numb, and a severe sharp pain overcame him, as if in reaction to the mental effort he had been through.

You have no place to go now, not ever. Noor? It is too dangerous to go to her, especially tonight. The police are surely going to search everywhere and suspect everybody. The darkness must extend to eternity.

¹⁷'Eshmāwī: The name of the most famous hangman in Egypt. His name became, and still is, a horrible legend in Egypt. Nowadays, the name automatically refers to any hangman.

Chapter VIII

He pushed the Sheikh's door open and entered, then closed it behind him. He found himself in the open yard, where he saw the towering palm tree piercing the sky, reaching the stars. He whispered to himself, "What a good hiding place!" He went quietly to the Shiekh's dark room which was open all night long and all day long, as if it were waiting for his return. He heard the Sheikh's voice murmuring something of which only the word "God" was clear. He went on murmuring as if he did not feel, or he did not want to feel his being there. Saeed sat down beside his books in a corner. Very tired he sat on the mat with his suit, tennis shoes, and gun. He stretched his legs and leaned on his arms with his head thrown backwards.

A very busy mind, like a bee hive, but is there a way out? You long to listen to the sound of the bullet again, or to Nabawiya's screams. You want to feel happy because you did not hear even one scream from Sanā'. You better say "Assalāmu 'Alaikum"¹⁸ to the Sheikh, but you are unable to produce a sound. A sudden feeling of inability; and you thought that you were going to sleep like a dead man the moment your skin touched the ground.

When does this strange man go to sleep? But the peculiar man was heard singing in a loud voice, "Love denied me, until I revealed it." With a voice which seemed to fill the whole room the Sheikh cried, "The eyes of their hearts were open, and the eyes of their heads were closed."

¹⁸Assalāmu 'Alaikum: Peace be upon you. It is the common greeting among Muslims.

He smiled amid his pains, and said to himself, "That's why he doesn't feel my presence; but even I do not feel my own presence."

Suddenly the voice calling for prayer swam over the quiet waves of the Nile. He remembered a night which he spent awake until dawn to listen to the prayer caller. Eager to experience a promised pleasure, he got up to pray. He couldn't remember anything about it anymore. VErY pleased to be relieved from a painful sleep, he looked through the window at the blue color of dawn and the smile of the east. He rubbed his hands, very pleased for the happiness to come. That is why he is fond of dawn, its lure, the blue color, the smile, and the forgotten happiness.

Here it is the dawn once more, but out of exhaustion he can't even move, nor can he move his gun. The Sheikh was getting ready to pray as he turned the gas lamp on paying no attention to Saeed's presence. He spread the prayer carpet and took his stand on it and inquired, "Aren't you going to perform dawn prayer?"

He was too exhausted to be able to answer. The Sheikh started to pray.

Soon, Saeed went to sleep and he had a dream. He dreamed of the prison, of guards whipping him in spite of his good conduct. He did not show any resistance or pride, but just cried. He dreamed that immediately after the whipping they gave him milk to drink. Then he dreamt of Sanā' whipping Ra'ūf 'Elwān under the staircase. He heard verses of the Qur'ān being recited and was sure that someone had died. He dreamed of himself in a car, unable to move on because of a temporary snag, being chased by unknown people. He was forced to shoot in the four directions. Ra'ūf 'Elwān suddenly emerged from the

car radio and held his wrist before he was able to shoot. He gripped Saeed's hand so hard that he was able to take the gun away.

Saeed Mahrān cried, "Kill me if you want, but my daughter is innocent. She wasn't the one who shipped you under the staircase. It was her mother Nabawiya who did it, urged on by 'Elaīsh Sidrah."

He quickly mixed with the group of men, headed by Sheikh Jinaidī, performing Sūfī rituals. He wanted to hide himself from those who were chasing him. The Sheikh did not recognize him and asked, "Who are you and how did you get here?"

He answered that he was Saeed Mahrān, son of his old follower, Sheikh Mahrān. He reminded the Sheikh of the palm tree, its dry fruit, and the good old days. The Sheikh asked him to produce his identity card. Astonished, Saeed said that a follower of the Sheikh needs no identity card. Before the faith, the upright and the sinner are equal. The Sheikh replied that he wanted to make sure that he is a sinner, because he does not like upright people. He offered him his gun, saying that each missing bullet meant a person murdered. The Sheikh insisted on seeing his identification card, saying that government regulations were strict on this point. Saeed wondered why the government should interfere in the faith. The Sheikh said that the whole procedure was suggested by the great Mr. Ra'ūf 'Elwān, who was nominated for the post of Chief Sheikh. Saeed wondered again, and said that Ra'ūf was simply a traitor who thought only of crime. The Sheikh assured him that this was the reason why Ra'ūf was chosen for the great post. He promised to introduce a new interpretation of the holy Qur'ān, including all the possibilities of material gains for all people, each according to his purchasing power. The revenue of this

enterprise should be used in establishing arms clubs, hunting clubs, and suicide clubs. Saeed said he was ready to assume the post of treasurer in the new administration. Ra'ūf 'Elwān would testify to his honesty as a former intelligent disciple. At this point, the Sheikh recited the "al-Fath"¹⁹ verses from the Qur'ān. Lamps were hung on the palm tree trunk. The singer cried out, "People of Egypt, congratulations, you have al-Hussain,"²⁰

He opened his eyes to see a red world without meaning or significance. Then he saw the Sheikh sitting quietly in a clean white clothes with a turban. As Saeed was waking up, the Sheikh looked quietly at him. Saeed got up quickly and looked at the Sheikh.

The Sheikh said, "It's afternoon now and you haven't had a bit to eat."

Saeed looked at the small round window and then looked again at the Sheikh exclaiming, "Afternoon!"

"Yes, I said to myself let him sleep. If God so wills. He may guide his steps even during his sleep."

Saeed got worried and wondered whether anybody had seen him during his sleep all day long.

"During my sleep I felt many people coming in."

"You felt nothing. However, somebody came with dinner, another

¹⁹"al-Fath": "The Victory." These verses recited from the Qur'ān (by Sheikh 'Alī in Saeed's dream) deal with the organization of the Muslim society.

²⁰al-Hussain: One of two grandsons of Prophet Muhammad, a brave man and a great thinker. His mother is Fātma, Muhammad's most beloved daughter.

came to clean the place, water the cactus and palm trees as well as to prepare the yard for receiving the followers!"

Saeed asked with deep interest, "When do they come, master?"

"At sunset. When did you come?"

"At dawn."

A moment of silence passed, and then the Sheikh, wiping his beard, said, "You are very unhappy my son."

Worried, Saeed asked, "Why?"

"You have slept for a long time, but you can't settle down, just like an infant under the burning sun, unable to walk, yearning for the shade. Have you learned how to walk yet?"

Saeed said as he rubbed his bloodshot eyes, "It's so disturbing to be seen asleep."

The Sheikh said reluctantly, "When you are unaware of things, things are unaware of you."

He felt the gun in his pocket and wondered what the Sheikh would do if he pointed it at him? Would it disturb his provocative composure?

The Sheikh asked again, "Are you hungry?"

"No."

A faint shadow of a smile glittered in his eyes, "Only if you feel the need for God will you feel rich."

"If." Then in a sarcastic tone, "Master, what would you do if you're plagued with a wife like mine, or denied by your daughter, as I was by mine?"

An expression of sympathy showed in the eyes of the Sheikh. He said, "God controls people's destiny, and a creature has only to obey."

Shut up before you betray yourself. You want to come out with it

all. He may not need your confession. He might have seen your shooting, he might have seen even more.

A voice cried out under the small round window selling the Abū al-Hoal newspaper. He got up quickly, looked through the window, extended his hand with a piaster to buy the newspaper, and came back to where he was sitting. He forgot everything about the Sheikh; he fixed his eyes on a big black headline:

Terrible crime at Qul'ah. He devoured the lines, but understood nothing. It is another crime? But there was his photograph, Nabawiya's photograph, and 'Elaīsh's. But who is that victim in a pool of blood? His whole story was spelled out before his eyes, a scandal spread out like the summer's winds; the man who got out of jail to find that his wife married one of his followers.

But who is the victim lying in a pool of blood? He understood nothing and read the whole piece of news again. The murdered, the man whom he has never seen before. Read again. 'Elaīsh and Nabawiya left their house on the very same day he went to visit them in the presence of the informer and the assistant. Another family moved into the apartment, maybe after purchasing the lease. The voice he heard was not 'Elaīsh's voice, nor was it Nabawiya's. The body which fell belonged to Sha'bān Ḥussain, the clerk at the haberdasher shop in Maḥammad 'Alī Street.

Saeed Mahrān had come to kill his wife and his old friend, but instead he killed the new tenant, Sha'bān Ḥussain. A neighbor of 'Elaīsh testified that he saw Saeed leaving the house after the crime was committed, and that he told the policeman, but his voice was not heard amidst the turmoil that engulfed the whole street.

What a crazy defeat, what a useless crime! He will be chased to the gallows while 'Ealīsh rests secure. This is the naked truth, shockingly revealed, as from an uncovered tomb.

He wrenched his eyes out of the newspaper only to see Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī looking at the sky through the small round window and smiling. Somehow, the Sheikh's smile frightened him. He felt an urge to stand by the Sheikh's side in order to see what there was in the sky to make him smile, but he did not translate this urge into action.

Let the Sheikh smile if he so desires, let him know his secret, but soon enough the followers will come. Some of them who have seen his photograph in the paper may recognize him. Thousands and thousands are now looking at his photograph with a feeling of strange pleasure. He killed him uselessly, and will be chased for the rest of his life. Alone, he has to be aware even of his reflection in the mirror. A real death, and life is like a stuffed body; he will have to run from one hole to another, like a mouse threatened by poison, cats, and the clubs of the disgusted. All this is bound to happen while his enemies are happy and gay.

The Sheikh turned to him and said tenderly, "You are tired. Get up and wash your face."

Folding the newspaper, he said impatiently, "Don't worry, I'm going."

The Sheikh said even more tenderly, "This is your shelter."

"Yes, but why couldn't I have another shelter?"

The Sheikh nodded and said, "If you had another shelter you wouldn't have come to me."

Go to the mountain until darkness envelopes the earth. Avoid

light and enjoy darkness. A useless effort you have made when you killed Sha'bān Hussain. Who are you Sha'bān, anyway? I don't know you and you don't know me. Do you have any children? Did it ever cross your mind that one day you would be killed by someone you didn't know? Did it ever cross your mind that one day you will be needlessly killed just because Nabawiay Sulimān has married 'Elaīsh Sidrah? And to be killed by mistake while 'Ealīsh, Nabawiay, or Ra'ūf are still alive. And me, the murderer doesn't understand anything. I wanted to solve part of the riddle, only to be confronted with a more mysterious one. He heaved a loud sigh.

The Sheikh said again, "You are very exhausted."

"And your world is very exhausting."

The Sheikh said with great satisfaction, "We say that sometimes."

He got up as he was about to go, "Farewell my lord."

The Sheikh said protestingly, "Farewell is a meaningless word, you should say good-bye."

Chapter IX

What darkness! Turn to a bat, that is better for you. And this fatty smell that sneaks from the door of one of the apartments at this hour of the night! When will Noor come back? Will she be alone? Should I stay at her house until I forget? Maybe you think that you have gotten rid of me forever, Ra'ūf? With this gun I can do beautiful things, on the condition that destiny does not stand against me. With it I can also wake those who are asleep, because they are the cause of my misery. They have created Nabawiya 'Ealīsh, and Ra'ūf 'Elwān. He thought that he heard footsteps coming up the stairs, and then he made sure of that by looking down the staircase. He saw a dim light emanating from a match, moving very slowly along the walls. Heavy, slow footsteps approached. He decided to make her aware of his presence in order to avoid a sudden surprise. He coughed. She asked in a terrified voice: "Who is it?"

He looked down with his head bent as low as possible and said in a whisper, "Saeed Mahrān."

She hurried up to him breathlessly and caught his arms with great pleasure. Happily, though still breathless, she said, "How ashamed I am to keep you waiting; have you waited for long?"

She opened the door and went in, pulling on his arm. When she turned a gas lamp on there appeared an empty, small triangular entrance. With him following her, she turned to a side room whose electric lamp showed its medium size and its square beams. She flung open the window to allow fresh air in. He threw himself on one of the sofas and complained, "I came here at midnight and waited until my hair turned white."

She took her seat on the other sofa after she cast aside some ready made clothes and a heap of rags. She said, "As a matter of fact I had no hope that you would come."

Their exhausted eyes met. He smiled to conceal his unmoved emotions. "Even after my solemn promise?"

A faint smile showed on her face and she did not answer. After a moment of silence, she said, "They questioned me to death at the police station yesterday. Where is the car?"

As he was taking off his coat and throwing it aside, showing a grey shirt covered with dust and sweat, he replied, "It was wise to get rid of it. They will find it and take it back to its owner, as a government should do when it takes the side of some thieves regardless of others."

Terribly worried, she continued, "What did you do with it yesterday?"

"As a matter of fact, nothing at all, and you will know all about it when the time comes."

Breathing deeply, he looked toward the window and said, "North side, I believe, brings in fresh air!"

"A desert until you get to Bāb al-Naṣr. Here is the cemetery."

He smiled and said, "That's why its air is not rotten."

She looked at you with eager eyes while you were terribly bored. Instead of consolation you would remember only being stabbed in your pride.

Noor, coming back to her original subject, said, "You waited on the stairs for a long time? I'm really very sorry."

He examined her with a mysterious look and said, "I will be

your guest for a long time."

Happily, she raised her head, saying, "Stay for the rest of your life if you wish!"

He looked at the window and smiled, "Until I move in at the neighbors."

As if she never heard him, she inquired, "Your relatives, don't they take care of you?"

"I have no relatives," said he, looking at his tennis shoes, "I have no relatives!"

"I mean your wife?"

She means pain and madness and the wasted bullets. She wants an admission which hurts his pride, but she will find out that opening a closed heart is getting harder, but lying will not do as long as the newspapers spell out the scandal.

"I said I have no relatives."

You are thinking of what I mean and your face shows how pleased you are. I hate such pleasure and now I can see that old age shows under your eyes.

"Divorced?" she asked.

Bored, he waved and said, "I was forced to divorce her when I was in jail, but let's put this conversation aside."

She angrily said, "She's a pig. For a man like you one can wait for a long time, even if your sentence was twenty-five years of hard labor."

What a cunning woman. A man like me does not like flattery. Beware flattery. How bad it really is to waste the bullets in the chests of the innocent.

"The truth is that I've neglected her very much."

"Anyway, she is a woman who does not deserve you."

She said the truth. Not any woman. But she is full of youth and activity while you are staggering towards the end. One blow and you will be off. Deep in my heart, I have only pity for you.

"Nobody should feel my presence in here," he said.

She assured him, as if she felt she was certain of possessing him forever, "With me, you are very safe." Then begging him, "Have you done something serious?"

Carelessly he shrugged his shoulders, but she stood up and said, "I will set a table for you; I have food and drink. Do you remember how rough you were with me in the past?"

"I did not have time for love."

She looked at him reproachfully. "Is there anything more important than that? I used to tell myself that maybe your heart was made of stone. Nevertheless no one was as sad as I was for your imprisonment."

"That is why I came to you."

But she said, uneasily, "You have met me by chance, and maybe you have completely forgotten me."

He deliberately frowned, asking, "Do you think that I will not be able to find myself another place?"

She was afraid that he might get angry, so she took his two cheeks in her hands apologizing. "I have forgotten that the guard does not allow the zoo visitors to touch the lion. I'm sorry, but how warm your face is, and your beard is so rough. What do you think of a cold shower?"

He welcomed the idea with a smile.

"To the bathroom," she said. "When you get out you will find the table already set for you; we will eat in the bedroom. It is prettier than this room, but it also overlooks the cemetery, just like this does."

Chapter X

What a great number of graves! They spread out reaching the horizon, the hands up in a gesture of surrender, as if nothing can really threaten them. The city of silence and truth, the place where success and failure, the murderer and the murdered are all together at the same time. The place where thieves and policemen lay peacefully side by side for the first and the last time. It seems that Noor's snoring will never cease until she wakes up at sunset.

And you will stay in this prison until the police forget all about you, but will the police really forget all about you? And as much as death betrays living people, the sight of these graves will remind you of betrayal itself, and then betrayal will remind you of Nabawiya, 'Elaīsh, and Ra'ūf, and you, yourself, are dead ever since you fired the blind bullet, but you have to fire more bullets.

He heard her yawning. He came back from the window, turning his eyes toward the bed to see Noor sitting there, almost naked with her ahir uncombed and her appearance dishevelled. She looked at him with an expression of relief in her eyes and said, "I dreamed that you were very far away and that I was waiting for your return like a made woman."

In a gloomy tone he said, "That was just a dream, but in reality it is you who will go far away, and I'm the one who will wait for your return."

She went to the bathroom and came back, drying her hair and her face. He followed her hands as she made up her face, a delighted and youthful one. Like him, she was in her thirties, but she never

hesitated to lie in order to hide her age. How many sins are committed in broad daylight, and what a pity that theft is not like that. He saw her to the door saying, "Don't forget the newspaper."

He went to the living room where he lay on a sofa. He felt lonely in the full sense of the word, even his books were left behind at Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī's. He tried to kill the time by looking at the pale white ceiling which seemed to reflect the old carpet of the room. Through the window he looked at the sky at sunset, the sky which seemed like a gem in which a flock of pigeons fly from time to time.

Your rejection, Sanā', is as painful as the sight of the grave. I wonder if we are going to meet again, or where and when? Your heart will never feel the love of your father in this life which is full of wasted bullets. And like bullets, many wishes are wasted in this world leaving behind nothing but a series of tragic actions. starting from the beginning at the students' house by the road in al-Jīza district. 'Elaīsh Sidrah was nothing but an insignificant person. Nabawiya enslaved my heart. But if betrayal appears on a face as a hideous fever does, no beauty would appear on that face unless it belongs there and many people will be saved from her intrigue and betrayal. The grocer's store was located right across from the students' house and Nabawiya used to come carrying a small pot to buy what she wanted in her neat, ornate clothes, which made her look different from other maids of the vicinity. She was known as the maid of the Turkish lady who lived alone in a house surrounded by a big garden. The Turkish lady was a rich lady, and a proud one, too, who forced those related to her in any way to look tidy, handsome, and very clean. Consequently, Nabawiya always used to look tidy, with her hair combed, her braids

falling down to her waist, with her slippers on. The vitality of her beautiful body showed beneath her clean dress. Even the eyes of those people, who were not affected by her spell, described her beauty as a country girls' beauty, especially her dark round face, the brown eyes, the small nose, the mouth watered with nectar, and the green tattoo²¹ on the chin. At the end of her duty he used to stand by the door of the students' house, looking toward the far end of the road from which she used to come, until his eyes came across the fine body and her alluring way of walking.

Then she gets nearer and nearer, emanating as she comes the most beautiful feelings of life. Whenever she goes by, pretty music hums in his ears. As with the pleasure of drinking, his eyes follow her and hide with her among the many girls standing in front of the grocery.

Sometimes she disappears in the crowd and other times she appears while you become more and more enchanted, inquiring and desiring to do something, anything, even a word or a wave, or some magic. But she finally makes her way back, warning you to disappear for a whole day and a whole night; then you give way to a bitter sigh, while the enchantment flies away gradually. The birds stop singing over the trees of the road, and the fall weather suddenly appears and covers everything. Then, you notice for a time that her body sways before your eyes and that she acts coyly, but you cannot stop; you pretend to walk at a normal pace in order to catch up with her; you block her way by the palm tree at the end of the road, she is taken aback, or pretending to be, she asks, "Who are you?" to which question you answer, surprised, "Who am I? Don't you know who I am? I'm the one whose

²¹A tattoo is considered as a beauty mark.

looks have left their imprint on each part of your body."

But she said sharply, "I don't like impoliteness."

And you answered, "Neither do I. On the contrary, I like politeness, beauty, and tenderness, all of which you embody. Now you don't know who I am, but I have to carry this basket for you and accompany you to the front door of your house."

"I don't need your help, and don't stand in my way any more," she insisted.

She walked and you walked beside her, encouraged by a faint smile which you felt as a tender breeze blowing in a hot night. She said, "Go back. You have to go back because my lady, who is sitting by the window, will see you if you walk any further."

You replied, "I'm really stubborn, but if you want me to go back, let us walk only a few steps back toward our lonely palm tree. I have to talk to you. Why can't I talk with you?"

She shook her head, but she slowed down, bending her neck like a wild cat.

Then I had no doubt that I had fulfilled my dreams, that Nabawiya shared some of my feelings, that she was fully aware of the history of my amorous sighs in front of the students' house. My waiting for her on the road would turn into something which would endanger my life, her life, and the life of the whole world. I said, "Until tomorrow, then," and stopped walking for fear of being seen by the old mysterious Turkish woman who lived in my area. Happily, I went back to the palm tree, climbed it with a monkey's speed, and jumped from a height of three meters into an orchard. Then I went back to the students' house singing with my rough voice like an enchanted bull.

When you joined al-Zayāt circus to earn a living you had to move out from one place to another and from one town to another, and you were afraid that if you were not near your lover you were going to lose her forever. Consequently, you asked her to marry you, you told her, "Let us get married." You proposed to her as you were standing by the University premises. It was unfair that you were not able to enter the University while many of the rich people did. At that time, there were no lights on the road or in the sky except for a dim crescent located over the horizon. She was happy and looked down, her narrow forehead was glittering under the faint light of the crescent.

I told her that my work was lucrative, my future was tremendous, and my residence was in al-Darrāsah, a clean apartment in the basement on the mountain road near the good Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī, with whom you will get acquainted when we get married, a thing which we must do as soon as we can for the sake of our life-long love.

When you told her that it was time for you to leave her old lady, she said, "I'm an orphan and I have nobody except an aunt at Seede al-Arb'aīn."

You said, "With God's blessing," and you kissed her under the pale crescent light. The wedding party was so enjoyable that it lived for a long time in the memory of everybody, and al-Zayāt gave me ten pounds, while 'Elaīsh Sidrah, out of happiness, looked as if he were the organizer of the wedding. He played the role of the honest godfather, but he was not a friend at all, and the most amazing thing was that I was deceived by him, me, the clever one who frightens even the red devils. I was the hero, and the hero's worshipper loved me and tried to avoid my fury. He used to pick up my leftovers. I was sure

that if I sent him with Nabawiya to the desert in which Moses was lost, he was, still, going to see me standing between him and her. He was not going to misbehave with her. And she, how could she throw herself to the dog leaving the lion? But filth is part of her nature; such dirt really deserves to be destroyed in this world as well as in the other one, under the condition that the blind bullets must not be wasted in the air to hit the innocent and miss the mean and the low.

The bullets must not hit the innocent, leaving behind hearts destroyed by pain, burned by anger, and collapsed in madness. But she forgets every good thing in this life, even the wedding night, the games of the boys in the alley, and love before it became rotten, the birth of Sanā', the face of Sanā' seen for the first time, listening to her cries and screams for the first time, carrying her in my arms for the first time and her countless smiles which I have not counted, though now I hope I have, or her picture and image, and I hope that, as I have forgotten many things, I could forget her rejection and her screams, which were echoed around the four corners of the earth and because of which the streams became dry. So were the breaths of fresh air and everything good in the world.

Darkness spread itself in the room. Outside the window the silence of the graves thickened. But you cannot switch on the light because the apartment must stay as it is when Noor is out of it, but your eyes will get used to such darkness, as they got used to the prison and the ugly faces. You are not going to find the opportunity to get drunk, for fear of any misdemeanor you might commit. The apartment must remain as silent as a grave, so that even the dead themselves will not feel your presence in here. God, only God, knows

how patient you are in this prison. Only He knows how long you are going to be there. Only He knew that you were going to kill Sha'bān Hussaīn, not 'Elaīsh Sidrah. But sooner or later you have to go out for a walk in the evening, at least in the safe places, but let us postpone this matter until the police get really tired of looking for nothing. Let us pray to God that Sha'bān Hussain is not buried in one of these graves. There's no room in this area for any more ironical situations; wait until Noor comes back. Don't ask when does Noor come back, because you have to struggle with darkness, silence, and loneliness as long as this life will not alter its strange ways. Poor Noor! Her old love for you is only a bad habit, and it hits a heart crushed by pain and anger, a heart that rejects her approaches as it rejects her worn-out body, a heart which does not really know what to do with her except to drink with her and to feel sorry for her.

But he will not forget, at the end, that she is a woman, as Nabawiya is, the coward, the traitor, who will be killed by her own will to survive. She will be frightened until the noose gets around your neck, or until a murderer's bullet settles in your heart and the police spoil your reputation so that all relations between you and Sanā' are severed forever. She will not even know a thing about the honesty and truthfulness of your love, as if it were also a blind, wasted bullet.

Sleep found its way to Saeed Mahrān's eyes. He dreamed for some time, a thing which he didn't realize until after he got up. He felt that he was in the darkness, alone in Noor's apartment on Najm al-Dīn Street, until he was sure that 'Elaīsh Sidrah had not taken him by surprise in his hideaway place, and that he had not shot him

in succession. Time passed quickly, and he didn't feel it. Soon enough he heard the sound of a key being turned in the lock, the slamming of the door, and the door window of the living room being lighted with the reflection of the light of the entrance. Noor appeared, smiling and carrying a big parcel. She hurried toward him and kissed him before she spoke, "A banquet: meats, sweets, and booze!"

He kissed her, inquiring, "Drunk already?"

"It's my job. I'll was and be back. Here are the newspapers."

He followed her with his eyes until she was gone. He skimmed through the morning and evening papers. To him there was nothing new in the papers. There were, however, some features on crime, more items than he really expected, especially what was published in al Zahra, Ra'ūf 'Elwān's newspaper. The paper wrote in detail about his history of burglary, the series of adventures which were unveiled after his trial, the places of the rich people which he had broken into, and his personality, his mysterious madness, and his criminal audacity, all leading to bloody murder.

What big black headlines! Now, thousands and thousands are discussing his crimes, joking at Nabawiya's treachery and betting on his destiny. He is the center of the news now. He is the man of the hour, but although he is proud of that, his heart shrinks from fear. He is about to be choked with rage. Dozens of thoughts crowd in his head. An intoxicating idea floods his brain, suggesting that he's about to enter a serious phase, as serious as genesis itself. He is one against the rest of the world, but they don't know, they have not known the language of silence and loneliness yet, and the mirror that

reflects their pictures is pale and misleading. When they look at it, they see strange people. Very astonished and impressed, his eyes are fixed on Sanā's photograph. His eyes are running over the photographs: his photograph, like a beast, that of Nabawiya, who looks like a fallen woman, then back to Sanā's smiling photograph. That is right, she is smiling because she does not see him and also because she knows nothing. He examines her picture very carefully, but he suddenly feels that the whole thing is only a game, and that the night outside the window breathes in grief and pain. In his disappointment he wishes that he could run away with her to a place unknown to anyone, and that he could see her even if this request was the last thing to ask before he is hanged.

He went to the other sofa to pick up the scissors from among the pieces of material which were piled there, then went back to his place to cut the photograph very carefully out of the newspaper. When Noor came back from the bathroom he was more composed. When she called him from the bedroom, he went to her wondering how she carried the whole news to him while she knew nothing about it. Her generosity was shown by the table she had set for him, and his desire for food and drink was very great. He sat beside her on a sofa across from the bed. in front of a table full of all kinds of food. Out of his satisfaction he patted her wet hair and tried to make conversation.

"You are quite different from all women."

She tied her hair with a red handkerchief as she started to fill their glasses, smiling all the time at his words, showing her light brown color without any makeup, refreshed with the fried pigeon, a modest but fresh food, very satisfied and very proud of having him,

even for a short time. He was satisfied to notice all that, but it was satisfaction without any enthusiasm.

She looked at him suspiciously and said, "You say that! I almost believe sometimes that mercy might know its way to the heart of the policemen before it knows its way to yours."

"Believe me, I'm happy to have you."

"Really?"

"Yes, the tenderness of your heart is irresistible."

"Wasn't I like that before?"

No easy victory could make one forget a bloody defeat.

"I was without a heart then!" he replied.

"And now?"

He took his glass saying, "Let us drink and enjoy ourselves."

They started to eat and drink with real appetite until she asked him, "How did you spend your time?"

He replied as he was dipping a rip in the tehena,²² "Between the darkness and the graves; don't you have any loved ones there?"

"My dead people are in the graves of al-Belinah,²³ God bless their souls, every one."

They kept silent except for the noise of chewing and the noise coming from the friction of the glasses and the creaking of the tray. Saeed then started to talk again. "I would like to ask you to buy me some materials to make a police officer's uniform."

²²Tehena: A kind of food in Arab countries, usually made from peeled seeds, lightly toasted and then ground.

²³al-Belinah: A village in upper Egypt.

"An officer's uniform?"

"Don't you know that I learned tailoring in jail?"

With an anxious look she asked, "But, why?"

"It's high time I enlisted."

"I don't want to lose you again, don't you understand?"

With peculiar confidence he replied, "Don't worry about me. If it were not for treason, the police would never had taken me in, never!"

She sighed to show her disappointment, but with his mouth full of food, he went on, "Aren't you in danger, yourself?" Then with a smile, he continued, "Suppose an outlaw attacks you in the desert, for instance?"

They laughed together and then she bent herself toward him and kissed his sticky lips and said, "The truth is, if we want to live we have to be afraid of nothing."

But he inquired, while he referred to the window with a movement of his chin, "Not even death?"

"God forbid!" Then carelessly, "I forget even death when I meet the one I love."

He admired her ability to love and preserve. He could only feel pity, respect, and gratitude towards her. A butterfly was embracing the naked lamp.

Chapter XI

Not a single day passes without the graveyard receiving new guests, as if there were nothing for you to do except stand behind the window to watch the unending procession of death. But those who come with the bodies of the dead are really the ones who deserve pity more than they who go in weeping crowds, and return drying their tears. Only a power stronger than death itself convinces them to survive. That was the way you buried your loved ones.

Mahrān, the good old janitor of the students' building. Hard work, satisfaction, and honesty. I worked with him since my childhood; and in spite of the simplicity and poverty, the family used to have a pleasant meeting in the room of the basement by the back yard of the building at the end of its day, the man and his wife talking while the child played. And because he believed in God, he also believed in being satisfied with what he got, thus, all the students respected him. His only pilgrimage was to Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī's house, and through him you knew the Sheikh's house too.

Saeed, come with me, I will show you a sport which is better for you than playing in the field; you will taste the delight of life in an atmosphere of grace. There, you'll feel reassured and secure. It's the best feeling in the world. With a tender look you were received by the Sheikh, and you greatly admired his white beard. The Sheikh told your father "Is this your son whom you talked to me about? Cleverness shows in his eyes, his heart is as pure as yours, and with God's help you will live to see him a good man."

To tell the truth, you liked Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī very much. You were enchanted by the light in his face and the rays of love

emanating from his eyes. Also, you liked the soft music which played in your heart even before it knew love.

Old Mahrān asked him once, "Teach this boy what he has to do."

To which the Sheikh, looking at you tenderly, said, "We all learn from the cradle to the grave, but Saeed, start by watching yourself, and let anything you do be of some good to a human being."

You followed his advice as much as you could, but you did not completely fulfill it until you took burglary as your profession. The days went on like dreams until good old Mahrān disappeared. The man disappeared in a mysterious way, which was misunderstood by the boy. Even Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī himself was unable to understand the riddle. "It's your misery . . . It's your misery . . . your father died." That's how your mother cried as she screamed and you were shaking your head and rubbing your eyes as her screams woke you up in the room in the basement of the students' house. You cried out of fear because you were not able to do anything else. But that night the gallantry of Ra'ūf 'Elwān, the student at the Law College, was clearly shown. He was a true friend all the way, and you used to love him even more than you loved Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī. Later, he was the one who mediated to appoint you in your father's place as janitor of the building, or to be accurate, to put you and your mother in your father's position. So, you took responsibility at an early age. Then your mother disappeared. As Ra'ūf 'Elwān has to remember, you were almost destroyed because of her illness. And the unforgettable day of the bleeding, the day when you took her very quickly to the nearest hospital, Šābir, standing like a castle in the midst of a very beautiful garden. You found your mother and yourself in a reception room by the

entrance, a room more luxurious than you had ever seen before. The whole place seemed alien to you but you needed medical care, urgent care, for your mother.

They showed him the famous physician as he walked out of a room, and Saeed ran toward him in his gallabiah and sandals screaming, "My mother . . . the blood." The man reluctantly examined him with two glassy eyes and looked where the mother was lying on a comfortable sofa with a bloody dress. There was a foreign nurse who was watching what was going on from a distance, but then he decided to disappear silently. The nurse then talked in a language which he did not understand, but he felt that she sympathized with his tragedy. He was angry, like a man in spite of his youth; he screamed, objecting and swearing; he threw a chair to the ground, and the chair made a loud noise, and its back flew in the air. Finally, many servants came in and very soon he found his mother and himself alone in the road. His mother died one month later in Quasr al-'Ainī Hospital.²⁴

When she was dying she held your hand in hers the whole time, refusing to take her eyes away from you. But during the month of her illness you stole and for the first time, yes, you stole from a country student who was one of the inhabitants of the students' building. Without any investigation the student accused you and hit you, but Ra'ūf 'Elwān interfered to release you from his hands and settled the matter without any further complications. You were really a friend, Ra'ūf, and, moreover, you were my teacher too.

²⁴Quasr al-'Ainī: A well-known public hospital in Cairo, Egypt.

When he was alone with you he quietly told you, "Don't be afraid. The truth is that I consider this kind of theft a legal occupation!" He also said in a warning voice, "But you will find the police after you." He told you in a mocking tone, "The judge will not make things easy for you, no matter how convincing your motives are, because he is also defending himself." Then, with the same mocking tone he inquired, "Isn't it just that what is taken by theft must also be returned by theft?" Then he cried angrily, "I'm learning, away from my people, and I struggle everyday out of pain, hunger, and despair." Where have your teachings gone, Ra'ūf? Maybe your beliefs died like my father, my mother, and my wife's honesty. Then you had to leave the students' building to find your future in another place. You waited by the only palm tree at the end of the field until Nabawiya came to you and you stepped forward towards her and said, "Don't be afraid. I have to talk to you. I'm going away. I'm going to find myself a job, save some money. I love you. Don't forget me, I love you, and I always will, and I'm going to prove to you that I will make you happy, and that I will open a house for you."

In those days all sadness was quickly forgotten and all wounds were cured in no time, as hope surmounted all kinds of difficulties very easily. So, you, the graves which are drowned in darkness, don't you mock or laugh at my memories.

He got up and sat on the sofa in the dark and talked to Ra'ūf 'Elwān as if he saw him in person. In a mocking tone he said, "You rascal, had you allowed me to work at your newspaper as a reporter, I could have published our memories together and eclipsed your false light." Then he inquired in a loud voice, "For how long should I put up with this darkness till Noor comes back just before dawn?"

Suddenly he felt an irresistible urge to leave for a stroll in the night. His resistance collapsed, like an old house collapses, in seconds. In less than a few minutes he was out of the house, walking very carefully toward the road of the factories, and then from there he went to the desert. When he got out of his hideaway his feeling of being followed and wanted increased. He shared with the mice and the snakes their feelings when they sneak out of their holes. Alone in the darkness with the city, whose lights were scattered on the horizon as if ready to jump on him, he felt lonelier than ever. He sat beside Tarazān on his sofa, but in the Cafe there was only one man, who was a smuggler of weapons, and the waiter. The crowd was sitting downhill. Very soon the waiter brought him some tea.

Then Tarazān bent toward him and whispered, "Don't stay in one place more than one night."

The smuggler said, "Run away to Upper Egypt!"

Saeed said, "I have nobody in Upper Egypt."

The smuggler said again, "Many people praised you in front of me and showed their admiration for you."

Tarazān then inquired, with some anger, "And the police, do the police admire him too?"

Then the smuggler laughed until his body was shaking in a peculiar way, as if he were riding a fast camel. He said, "The police don't like anything!"

Saeed murmured, "Or anybody!"

The waiter said, enthusiastically, "What harm is there in stealing from the rich?"

Saeed smiled, as if he were receiving an ovation from admirers at a

gathering to honor him. "The newspapers have a longer tongue than the noose of the hangman. What will the love of people do for you if the police hate you?"

Tarazān stood up suddenly, ran to the window, looked right and left, then came back quietly saying, "I thought I saw a face looking in at us!"

Saeed's eyes glittered and looked toward the window, and then to the door, while the waiter went to find out. The smuggler said, "You always see things which do not exist."

Tarazān shouted, "Keep quiet! You think that the noose is something to joke about?"

Saeed left the Cafe with his fist clenched on his gun. He went to the desert, looking around him and listening very carefully. His feeling of being followed and of loneliness and anxiety increased. He realized that he must not underestimate the block of enemies who were full of lust and fear, and who would never be satisfied until they saw him dead. When he approached the house at Najm al-Dīn Street, he saw light coming through Noor's window, and for the first time since he left the Cafe, he felt comfortable and relaxed. He found her lying down. He meant to fondle her a little, but her face showed her utter exhaustion. Her eyes were bloodshot; she was clearly very ill.

He sat at her feet and asked, "What's wrong with you, Noor?"

In a very weak voice she replied, "Dead; I have vomited to death!"

"Booze?"

Fearfully, she said, "I have been drinking all my life."

It was the first time he saw her tears, and he was moved.

"Then what is the matter?" he asked.

"They have beaten me."

"The police?"

"Some young people, students I think, when I asked for my fees!"

With some sympathy he murmured, "Wash your face and drink some water."

"Later, I am very tired."

He angrily murmured again, "The dogs!"

He patted her legs to show his sympathy, but she said, with her finger pointed to a parcel on the sofa, "The material for the uniform." His hand on her became more tender and grateful. She went on apologetically, "You won't like me tonight."

"Don't worry, wash your face and go to bed."

Silence separated them and a dog barked at the end of the cemetery. Noor heaved a deep sigh and said, in deep grief, "She said you have a rosy future ahead of you."

"Who said that?" he wondered aloud.

"The fortune-teller, and she said security and comfort will know their way to my heart."

He looked at the ever increasing darkness outside the window. She went on talking.

"When will it come? I have waited for long, but there is no use. I have a girlfriend who is much older than I am; she always repeats that at the end we all become a heap of bones that even dogs won't look at."

He could find no words. Noor's voice sounded as if it were coming from the grave, a thing which made him very sad. She went on talking.

"Do you believe a fortune-teller? Where is security? I want a safe quiet life. Is that difficult for God, who put the seven skies in place?"

You too have dreamt of such a life, but in spite of that your life was spent in climbing houses, jumping from roofs, hunting in the darkness, and wasting bullets to kill the innocent.

"You need some sleep."

"I need the promise of the fortune-teller, and that day will come."

"All right."

But she said angrily, "You treat me as if I were a baby."

"Not at all."

"That day will come, indeed."

Chapter XII

He put on the police officer's uniform. She looked at him surprised, then she pleaded. "Please be wise, I can't lose you again."

He pointed to the uniform with pride and said, "Wisdom made me make it."

He looked at his reflection in the mirror very carefully and then said, in a mocking tone, "I think it is better to be satisfied with a captain's rank."

She heard of his adventure the following night and saw his photograph in a weekly magazine with some of her passing friends. She collapsed in front of him in utter despair and said, "You committed murder! What a disaster! Haven't I begged you?"

"That happened before we met," he replied.

Deeply disturbed, she went on in despair and doubt, "You don't love me, I know that, but we could have lived together until you loved me!"

"There is still a chance."

Even more disappointed she said, "But you have committed murder, what is the use?"

He smiled in confidence and said, "How easy it is to run away together."

"What are we waiting for?"

"Until the hurrican calms down!"

She stamped on the floor and said, "I heard that the police are surrounding the outside of Cairo, as if you were the first to commit murder."

The newspapers . . . the hidden way! But he said with a faked calm, "I will escape when I decide to escape, you'll see." He held her braid angrily and said, reproachfully, "Don't you know who Saeed Mahrān is? Listen to me, we will live together forever, and what the fortune-teller told you will come true."

To get away from loneliness and to seek some fresh news he went the following evening to Tarazān's Cafe. The moment he appeared at the entrance of the Cafe, Tarazān came to him and together they went to a deserted place, where he said apologetically, "Please, excuse me, even my Cafe is no longer a safe place for you."

Although darkness hid his feelings of rage, Saeed said furiously, "I thought the hurricane had calmed down."

"On the contrary, it is blowing more strongly everyday. Disappear, but don't try to get out of Cairo now."

Furious, Saeed inquired, "Can't the newspapers find another subject besides Saeed Mahrān?"

"They published everything about your previous raids, so much that they turned police headquarters against you."

As Saeed was about to go, Tarazān said, "Let's meet each other away from the Cafe if you wish."

He went back to his hideaway at Noor's house to loneliness, darkness, and waiting. He furiously cried, "It's you, Ra'ūf, behind all this."

Every other paper neglected, or was about to neglect the matter except al-Zahra, which was still digging into the past and provoking the police.

This paper is bent on showing his heroic actions in order to

destroy him, and Ra'ūf will never stop until the noose gets around his neck. On his side Ra'ūf has all the law, iron and fire. And you, is there any meaning for your worthless life unless you destroy your enemies? 'Elaīsh Sidrah's place is unknown to you and Ra'ūf 'Elwān lives in a fortress. But what is the meaning of your life if you don't punish your enemies? There is no power in the world that could stand between you and revenge. The dogs! That's right, no power, whatsoever. Then with a louder voice, "Ra'ūf 'Elwān, tell me, how could time change people in that horrible way?"

The revolutionary student. Revolution itself embodied in a student. And your strong voice travels to me while I am by my father's feet in the yard of the building -- a power which wakes the spirit up through the ears. You talk about the princess and the pashas. As if by magic, the masters turned into thieves. Your image, while you and your mates are walking in gallabiahs in the country road sucking sugar cane sticks, is unforgettable. The most magnificent and wonderful thing, which even Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī does not possess, is that you raise your voice so loudly that it covers the whole field and the palm trees. That was the way you were among us, Ra'ūf. Only for your sake did my father make me join the school, and when success was fulfilled you gave way to laughter and you told my father, "Do you see? You did not want him to learn, look at his eyes, he will be one of the revolutionaries." You taught me how to love books and you discussed things with me as if I were your mate and on the same level with you. I was among your listeners at the palm tree that was watered with my love, and the whole world used to listen to you. The people . . . burglary . . . the holy fire . . . wealth . . . starvation,

magnificent justice. When you were jailed for political reasons your image was so magnified in my mind that my enthusiasm for my first theft was greatly enhanced. Your words about theft restored my dignity. Remember the day you told me sadly, "Minor thefts are of no importance, the whole thing must be organized!" From that time on I have never stopped reading and stealing. You were also guiding my steps to the great names who really deserved to be robbed. I found my glory and my dignity in burglary. I have been very generous with many people among whom, to my regret, was 'Elaīsh Sidrah. Then, with an angry voice he said in the dark room, "Are you really Ra'ūf 'Elwān, the owner of the palace? Are you the snake behind the campaign in the papers? You would like to finish me, just like everybody else; just as you long to kill your own conscience and the whole past. But I will not die before I kill you first. You are the first and the chief traitor."

How absurd it would be if I was hanged for murdering a person I did not even know. For life and death to have a meaning I must kill you Ra'ūf. Let this be my last angry cry against the evil of this world. Every dead body in the graveyard under this window supports me. I will leave the interpretation of this riddle to Sheikh Jinaidī.

At sunrise he heard the door being opened. Noor came in carrying food, drink, and newspapers. She looked a little happier, as if she had forgotten the sad events of yesterday and the day before. The darkness of his exhausted heart was dispelled and he rose to embrace the world, food, drink, news and all. She kissed him and he gratefully kissed her back, spontaneously, for the first time. He wished she would never go away. Hers was the heart emanating love in his life

before his death. He poured himself a drink and gulped it quickly.

She asked him as she looked at his exhausted face, "Why didn't you go to sleep?"

He did not answer because he was reading the papers, but she went on pitifully, "Waiting in the darkness is torture"

Putting the newspaper aside, he asked her, "How is it outside?"

"The usual!"

She took off all her clothes except for a transparent gown. He smelled a mixture of powder and sweat. She went on, "Many people think of you as a hero, but they have no idea about our agony."

He said simply, "The large majority of our people neither fear the thieves nor hate them" Ten minutes passed with eating barbequed meat. Then he said, "But they hate the dogs by nature!"

Licking her fingers, she said with a smile, "I like dogs."

"I don't mean those dogs."

"Yes, I always had them in my house until I saw the death of the last one and I cried bitterly, and decided not to have any more dogs in the house."

"We have to avoid love if it promises nothing but agony."

"You neither understand me nor love me."

"Don't be unjust. Don't you see that the whole world is unjust?" he pleaded.

She drank too much until she became dizzy and admitted to him that her real name was Shalabiah. She told him some jokes from the time she was a child in al-Belīnah Village. Childhood, the stagnant water, youth, and the escape. Then she said proudly, "And my father

was an 'Umdah."²⁵

"He was the servant of the 'Umdah!" he said simply. She frowned, but he said quickly, "You said that in the old times."

Unveiling her teeth, covered with parsley, she laughed and said, "Have I really said that?"

He said sharply, "And that's how Ra'ūf 'Elwān turned into a traitor.

She looked at him inquisitively and asked, "Who is Ra'ūf 'Elwān?"

He replied angrily, "Don't lie. Anyone who suffers darkness, loneliness, and waiting does not endure lying!"

²⁵Umdah: An official chief of a village; his duties are similar to those of a sheriff in the American Old West.

Chapter XIII

Just after midnight Saeed went into the desert while there was still some of the moon left in the western part of the sky. When he was about a hundred meters away from the hill of the Cafe, he whistled three times and waited. He had to strike or go mad. He expected to get news from Tarazān. Very soon Tarazān approached him, like a wave of darkness. They embraced. Saeed inquired, "Anything new?"

As he was catching his breath, Tarazān said, "Finally one of them has come."

Eagerly, Saeed asked, "Who?"

He squeezed his hand saying, "Mua'lim Beyāza, and now he is in the Cafe making a deal."

"It's not in vain that I've waited. What do you know about his route?"

"He will return along the mountain road."

"Thanks Mua'lim."

He went rapidly east, guiding himself by the dim light up to the forest by the water springs. He walked by its western triangle until he reached its pointed head, deep in the sands at the beginning of the road sliding toward the mountain. He hid himself behind a tree and watched the road. A breath of dry refreshing air blew, and a whisper came from the small spot of the forest. The desert was as wide as infinity itself. With his hand on the gun he was thinking of the chance to jump on his unexpected enemy and then to fulfill his hard goal, and finally of his own destruction as a final settlement. He said in a voice which even the trees, drunk with air, could not hear,

"'Elaīsh Sidrah and Ra'ūf 'Elwān in one night, and then let it happen, whatever it might be."

He felt the agony of waiting, but he didn't wait too long before he saw a ghost coming quickly in the darkness from the direction of the hill at the front of the forest. When the figure was only one meter from the end of the road, Saeed got out of his hiding place, pointed the gun toward him, and said, "Stop."

The ghost was nailed, as if struck by an electric shock, speechless. Saeed stared at the man, "Beyāza, I know where you have been, what you have done, and how much money you have on you."

The ghost's breathing was as clear as the hissing of a snake. He made a slight hesitant movement and murmured, "The children's money!"

He slapped him in the face and made him stagger. "Beyāza, don't you know me, you dog?"

Beyāza said, "Who? I recognized the voice but I didn't believe my ears. Is it Saeed Mahrān?"

"Don't move. You will be killed at the first movement."

"You kill me! Why? We are not enemies."

Saeed stretched his hand into Beyāza's vest pocket until he found his heavy wallet, and with some force he pulled it out, saying, "This is one!"

Scared, Beyāza said, "That's my money and I am not an enemy of yours."

"Shut up, I have not yet taken all I want."

"We are colleagues; that you must respect!"

He moved the gun in his hand and said, "If you want to save your life tell me where 'Elaīsh Sidrah lives."

The man assured him, "I don't know, nobody knows."

Saeed dealt him a stronger blow and shouted angrily, "I will kill you if you don't show me where he lives and you will not get your money back until I make sure you are telling the truth!"

The man answered painfully, "I don't know, I swear I don't."

"Liar!"

"I swear by anything."

"Did he vanish into thin air?"

Begging him to believe, Beyāza went on, "I don't know, nobody knows. He moved out of his apartment just after your visit lest you should destroy him; he moved out to Rood al-Raraj quarter."

"His address?"

"Wait, Saeed. After Sha'bān Hussaīn's murder he traveled with his family without telling anyone about his destination; he was afraid and the woman was terrified too. Nobody knows anything about them!"

"Beyāza!"

"Honest to God, I'm telling the truth!"

He slapped him for the third time, but Beyāza screamed with a torn voice, "Why do you hit me, Saeed? Let him go to hell wherever he is; is he my brother or my father that I would die for him?"

In spite of everything, Saeed finally believed him, but he was disappointed not to find his rival. If it were not for the murder he had committed he could have patiently waited until the proper time came, but the blind bullet hit his most cherished wishes.

Then Beyāza suddenly said, "You were unjust to me!" He did not say a thing, so the man went on, "And my money?" The man felt his two inflamed cheeks and said, "I didn't do you any harm; therefore you

have no right to take my money; we're colleagues after all."

"You were among his assistants," Saeed said scornfully.

"I was his friend and his partner, but that does not mean that I am your enemy. I have nothing to do with his treason." The struggle came to an end and now there was nothing to do except retreat.

Saeed said honestly, "I need some money."

"Take what you want," said Beyāza.

Ten pounds satisfied Saeed, and the man ran away not believing that he was saved. Saeed found himself as he started, lonely, in the desert where the moonlight was clear and the trees were swaying.

It seems that 'Ealīsh Sidrah has gotten away from the claws of punishment. He saved his life to add another traitor to the secure ones. As for you Ra'ūf, you're my last hope that my life won't end in vain.

Chapter XIV

He went back home, and then at one o'clock he left as a police Major. He went to al-'Abbasiya Street, avoiding the light of the street lamps and walking very normally due to his strong nerves. He took a taxi to al-Jalā',²⁶ passing some policemen whom he naturally did not like. He went to the nearby boat pier and rented a small boat. For two hours he went rowing west toward the palace of Ra'ūf 'Elwān, enjoying the wet air under a clear sky full of stars and the full moon lighting the trees along the beach. He felt very active. He had a feeling that something horrible would happen soon. He convinced himself that 'Elaīsh's safety was not a defeat for him as long as he was going to punish Ra'ūf 'Elwān, because Ra'ūf was the symbol of the treason which included 'Elaīsh, Nabawiya, and all the traitors on earth.

He told Ra'ūf 'Elwān and the rest while he was rowing, "Your time has come. If the arbiter was anyone except the police, I would have guaranteed to punish you in front of all people; they are all on my side, except the real thieves, and that is my consolation for the eternal loss. I am your conscience, which you have sacrificed, but I need to organize myself, as you said before. Today I understand much of what I had not understood before of your old words. My real tragedy is that in spite of the support of millions of people I find myself thrown in dark loneliness with nobody beside me, an impossible loss. Even a bullet will not negate this absurdity, but it will be a

²⁶al-Jalā' Bridge: Joins downtown Cairo to al-Jīzah section. Jalā' means to expel; here the expelling of the British from the country.

suitable, bloody objection anyway, in order for both the dead and the living ones to feel good and in order for them not to lose the last hope."

He directed the boat toward a spot almost facing the palace. He jumped to the ground, drew the boat to the bank, and climbed the side cliff to the Nile bank, very confident and relaxed in his official uniform. The coast was clear; there was no sign of any detective around the palace, a thing which gave him a feeling of comfort, though not without some anger. It was very dark around the palace except for the main door lamp, which made him sure that the owner of the palace had not come back yet, and that would free him from breaking into the house, and would make everything easier for him. With a normal step he walked to the street on the left side of the palace, and then he went to al-Jīzah Street, toward the other street on the left side of the palace, coming back to the Nile bank while he examined the whole place very carefully. He went toward a tree where he hid himself in a dark spot away from the street lamp and waited. His eyes were fixed on the palace all the time, except for some moments when he wanted to relax his eyes by looking at the black surface of the water. In his mind there were many thoughts about Ra'ūf's treason, the trick which destroyed his life, the loss that was revolving around him, and the death that was blocking his way and thoughts of how all these facts together had made the death of Ra'ūf necessary. He was following every coming car with his eyes while he was getting ready to attack. Finally a car stopped in front of the main gate of the palace and the janitor pulled the car door open wide. Saeed ran toward the street on the left side of the palace; he walked close to the wall and then

stopped at a point by the side of the main stairs, where the man would get out of the car. The lamp was turned on and light flooded the whole entrance. Saeed took his gun out of his pocket and pointed it toward the target. The car door was opened and Ra'ūf 'Elwān got out of the car.

Saeed shouted, "Ra'ūf!"

Astonished, the man looked in the direction from which the voice came and Saeed shouted again, "I'm Saeed Mahrān, . . . take this."

But at the same moment there was a bullet shot at him from the garden, the sound of which deafened his ears. This happened even before he used his gun. He was suddenly upset as he was firing his gun. He bent down rapidly to avoid the continuous flood of bullets. Desperately insistent, he raised his head, pointed his gun again and shot once hurriedly. All this took place in seconds, after which he ran away as fast as he could toward the Nile bank. He jumped at the boat, pushed it into the water, and in the following seconds he was rowing with all his power toward the other bank of the Nile. His feelings rotated around him like a vortex, and his strength was released directly and unconsciously from its deepest source. He thought that bullets were being shot, that some voices were gathering, and that some parts of his body were melting. The distance between the two banks of the Nile was narrow and he very soon reached the other bank where he jumped, leaving the waves to play with the boat. He went up the street with his hand clenched on the gun in his pocket. In spite of his feeling of disturbance he walked quietly and slowly, not even looking to his right or his left. He was sure that there were some footsteps rushing toward the shore, and that there were also

some voices getting louder and louder over the bridge. Suddenly a mad whistle penetrated the lazy air. Every moment he expected to be chased by someone, but he got himself ready to play every probable role or to get himself into the final battle. Before anything could happen, he called a taxi and got into it quickly. The moment he took his place in the car he felt a sharp pain, but in spite of that he felt safe. He sneaked into the house in complete darkness and threw himself on the sofa in his official uniform. The pain returned where his hand felt a sticky liquid. Ugh . . . did he stumble into something? A bullet? Behind the wall or while he was running away? He ran his hand on the injured spot and guessed that it was only a superficial bullet wound on the knee. He stood up in the darkness, took the uniform off, looked for his gallabiah on the sofa, and put it on. He walked up and down the room to make sure that his knee was all right.

In the old days you crossed Maḥammad 'Alī Street running with a fresh bullet in your leg. You have the ability to do wonders; and you may also have the chance to escape. As for the wound, some powdered coffee²⁷ will heal it. But have you hit another poor innocent. But Ra'ūf 'Elwān must have been killed because your hand never misses the target, as the desert behind the hill testifies. You will send a letter to the newspapers under the title "Why I Killed Ra'ūf 'Elwān." Only then will life regain its lost meaning, because the bullet which kills Ra'ūf 'Elwān kills all absurdity at the same time. Life without manners is like a universe without gravity. My only wish is to have a

²⁷ Powdered coffee is used in the Arab World as a common treatment to cease wound's bleeding.

meaningful death.

Noor came in very exhausted, carrying a lot of food dainties and kissed him as usual. She smiled to welcome him, but her look was suddenly frozen at the sight of the trousers. She put the parcel aside and said, "Blood!"

He noticed that for the first time and uncovered his leg saying, "A small scratch. I hit my leg on the taxi door."

She shouted, "You went out in the uniform for some reason; you will not stop at anything, and I will die in agony."

"Some ground coffee will cure this wound before sunrise."

"You are killing me before I die. Oh, when does this nightmare end?"

Very nervously, she put some ground coffee on the wound and then she wrapped it with a bandage taken from the pieces of the dress she was sewing. All night long she damned her luck.

He told her, "Take a shower, it will make you feel good."

"You never know what makes me feel good!" she said.

By the time she came back to the bedroom he had drunk one third of the bottle and regained some composure. He addressed her, saying, "Drink, I am here in a secure, pleasant place away from the eyes of the police."

As she was combing her wet hair she said sadly, "I am miserable." As he went on drinking, "Who could judge what tomorrow will bring?"

"Our work!"

"Nothing, nothing except being near you, a thing which I cannot spare."

"You just say so!"

"And more, you are a heaven in the middle of the bullets which chased me."

She heaved a deep sigh. "I must admit, though, that you are a very good lady."

Saeed said, "I am miserable, I wish to have nothing more than to see you in safety."

"We still have a chance."

"To run away. Think of running away."

"Yes, . . . but let's wait until the dog closes his eyes." Then she added sharply, "But you go out without taking any precautions. You wish to kill your wife and the other man; and you won't kill them but you will throw yourself in danger."

"What do you hear outside?"

"A taxi driver who defended you very enthusiastically, but he said that you have killed a weak, innocent man."

He heaved an angry sigh and beckoned to her to drink. He then inquired, "What else have you heard?"

"In the Nile boat house in which I spent some time one of them said about you that you put some life in our dull existence."

"And you, what have you said?"

She looked at him reproachfully saying, "Not a word, I care for you, but you don't care for me, you don't love me. To me, you are dearer than myself and my life. All my life I haven't known happiness, except with you, but you prefer destruction to my love."

She cried with the glass in her hand, but he embraced her and whispered into her ear, "I will not break my promise. We will run away and live together forever."

Chapter XV

What big headlines and exciting photographs, as if it were the biggest piece of news all the newspapers were patiently waiting for. They asked Ra'ūf 'Elwān, who answered that Saeed Mahrān was a servant at the students' building when he, Ra'ūf, was living there, and that he used to take good care of him. Ra'ūf also said that Saeed visited him after he got out of jail, asking for help, and that he gave him some money to start a new life with. But Saeed tried to break into his house on the same night. Ra'ūf said that he caught him, but decided to release him out of mercy, but he, Saeed, finally came to kill him. The newspapers accused him of madness, megalomania, and bloodshed. His wife's betrayal cost him his senses. He fired indiscriminately. Ra'ūf 'Elwān was all right, but the poor guard dropped dead. Another innocent man.

As Saeed read the piece of news, he cried, "Damn it!"

The storm is gathering momentum. There is a big prize for anyone who can show the police your whereabouts. Reports warn the people against any kind of sympathy given to you. You are the most important thing in this world, and you will remain the same until you die. You are causing fear and awe, like a metaphysical phenomena. Bored people will get a moment of pleasure out of you. As for your gun, it seems that it does not kill anybody but the innocent, and you will be its last victim.

With a low voice he inquired, "Is that what they call madness?"

You always wished to destroy the whole world and turn it upside down, even when you were just a clown. Your victorious raids on the palaces used to intoxicate your proud head. And Ra'ūf's false words,

which you believed, turned your head.

He was alone in the night, and there was still some liquor in the bottle. He drank up the last drop. He stood in the darkness surrounded by a grave-like silence and he started to become dizzy. He felt that he could overcome all difficulties, sneer at death and play to a sweet and unknown tune. He talked to the darkness saying, "A wasted bullet put me in the center of the news."

He went to the window and looked at the graveyard under the moonlight and cried, "Ladies and gentlemen, members of the jury, listen to me very carefully, because I have decided to defend myself, by myself."

He went back to the center of the room, where he took his gallabiah because it was hot in the room and because of the increasing heat in his stomach due to what he had drunk. He felt the wound in his knee under the bandage, a thing which made him believe that the knee was about to be healed. He stared in the darkness and said, "I am not like the rest behind these bars before me. Education and culture should receive special consideration in this court. As a matter of fact there is no difference between you and me except that you are out of jail while I am in it and this is only a slight, insignificant difference. The funny thing is that my dangerous teacher is nothing but a mean traitor and you have the right to wonder, but as it happens the cord which connects the electric bulb might be stained with the dirt of flies."

He went to the sofa and threw himself on it. From a distance he heard a dog barking. But how would you believe in the honesty of your judges while there's mutual hatred between them and you, a thing which has nothing to do with the public good? They are relatives of

the mean Ra'ūf, and there is the distance of a country between you and them. And you ask for the victims' testimony. Rest assured that treachery has become a silent conspiracy.

"I have not killed Ra'ūf 'Elwān's servant; how could I kill a man I don't know and who does not know me? If Ra'ūf 'Elwān's servant was killed, it is because he was Ra'ūf 'Elwān's servant; as simple as that. Last night his ghost visited me and I was ashamed to show myself to him, but he told me that there are millions who kill others by mistake and for no reason."

These words will be known to the world, words full of innocence. You are sure of what you are saying. Moreover, in their inner thoughts they believe that you're in the legal profession, one of the masters everywhere and always. A man evaluated, in terms of how much money he has only according to false principles. Be happy, because the judge on the left side is winking his eyes at you.

"I will always seek Ra'ūf 'Elwān's head, even if it were the last demand I ask from the hangman, even before seeing my daughter. My days are numbered. Therefore, I must not count what I have left of them by days because the days of a haunted person are feelings, feelings which cherish his loneliness.

The sentence will not be harder than Sanā's rejection; she killed you before the hangman could. Millions gave you their silent sympathy, a sympathy which is like the wishes of the dead. Don't they forgive the gun its mistake while it is their God?

"By killing me, they are killing millions. I am the dream, the hope, and the ransom of cowards. I am the example, the consolation, and the tears which betray the one who sheds them. To say I am mad

must include all of those sympathetic people, so, examine the reasons for this mad phenomena and then give your judgment, whatever it might be."

His dizziness increased. He ended up by reassuring himself that he was great in the full sense of the word, a tremendous greatness which should last after death. The madness of his greatness was blessed by the living energy in the roots of the plants, the veins of animals, and the hearts of men.

Suddenly, he was overtaken by sleep. He did not realize that he really slept until he was awakened by a light flooding the whole room. He opened his eyes to find Noor standing there, casting a blank look at him, with her mouth open and her back bent in desperation. She looked like a true symbol of disappointment and loss. She had heard of the last murder, and that made her lose her breath.

"You are more cruel than I thought; I don't understand you, but by Allah have mercy on me and kill me." He sat down on the sofa without uttering a word. "You are thinking of murder not of escaping, and you are going to be killed. Do you think that you are going to defeat the authorities with their soldiers in the streets in great numbers?"

"Sit down, let's talk calmly."

"Where should calm be? Besides, what are we going to talk about? Everything is over. Please kill me to end my torture."

"Nothing will ever harm you." He told her with calm tenderness.

"I will not believe a word of what you say. Why did you kill the janitor?"

"I didn't mean to do him any harm!" he said sharply.

"And the other? Who is Ra'ūf 'Elwān? What is between you both?"

Was there any relationship between him and your wife?"

He gave a dry laugh like a cough, "A funny idea! There are some other reasons. He is a traitor also, but of another kind. I can't make you understand everything."

She said angrily, "But you can torture me till death."

"I said sit down so that we can talk calmly."

"You still love your wife, that traitor, but you are torturing me."

He said painfully, "Noor, don't increase my torture, I am very disturbed."

She was silent, deeply moved by his pained state, which she had never seen before. Then very sadly, she said, "I feel that I am losing everything dear to me in life."

"Nonsense. It's just your fear, but an adventurer like me does not take heed of difficulties, I will remind you of that."

She asked tearfully, "When?"

Pretending unlimited confidence, he said, "Sooner than you think."

He bent toward her and drew her to him. He put his forehead close to hers, until his nose was full of the smell of liquor and sweat. He was not disgusted, and he kissed her with honest and deep sympathy.

Chapter XVI

Although it was almost dawn, Noor had not come back yet. He was tired of thinking and waiting until he felt drowsy. Suddenly the darkness was dispelled as an ominous question occurred to him. Could the promised reward play havoc with Noor's heart?

His blood has been polluted with distrust to the last drop. And treason has become like the smell of a dusty storm on a hot summer day. How many times in the past did he think that Nabawiya was his own? Maybe in reality she never loved him, even at the time of the lonely palm tree at the end of the field. But in spite of all this, Noor will not betray him or give him up to the police to get the reward, because she's getting old and bored with her life and she longs for true love and sympathy. He shouldn't mistrust Noor, but when will she come back?

You're starving, thirsty, and it's so hard to wait. It is similar to that day when you stood by the tree waiting. Waiting for Nabawiya, and she didn't turn up. Biting your fingernails, you went around the old Turkish lady's house. Out of desperation you were almost going to break the door open. When you saw her coming, an overwhelming joy overcame you, a kind of intoxicating bliss that penetrated your whole being. Tears were mixed with smiles and confidence with overwhelming happiness. Do not remember that time of the palm tree. It is gone now. Years of blood, bullets, and madness separate you from that past time.

How awful waiting is in this dark hot evening. It seems that Noor does not want to come back to save him from the agony of loneliness, darkness, starvation, and thirst.

In spite of everything, he slept -- despairing of any possibility for remorse. When he opened his eyes again, daylight was already flooding the window-panes, and the room was getting warmer. Alarmed, he jumped abruptly to the floor and moved to the bedroom where he found everything as it was the night before. He looked around the apartment. No, Noor hadn't come back yet. I wonder where this woman spent her night? What kept her from coming? Why should he be in this isolated and lonely prison? In spite of his restlessness he was starving. He went to the kitchen where he found, in the dirty dishes, some crumbs of bread, some tiny pieces of meat still sticking to the bones, and some parsley. He greedily finished everything and licked the bones like a dog. The day was over as he was wondering about her absence and about whether she would be back. Sometimes he sat and he walked around at other times. He could not find a thing to do to pass his time except to look through the window at the cemetery, to follow the funerals, and to count the graves in vain. Evening approached, but she had not come back yet. That did not happen without reason; where was Noor? He was torn by anxiety, depression, and hunger. No doubt Noor is in some kind of trouble, but she must solve her problem and come back, or how could life go on without her!

Just after midnight he stealthily left the house. He crossed the desert toward Tarazān's Cafe. In the usual place he whistled three times and waited until Mu'lim Tarazān came to him. The man shook hands with him and said, "Be very careful, informers are everywhere."

"I want some food!"

"Dear me! Hungry?"

"Yes, It's hard times, Mu'lim!"

"I will send the boy to fetch you some kebab, but it really is dangerous for you to be out."

"In the old times, we came through more dangers, you and me."

"No, the last campaign turned the whole world over your head."

"It has always been like that."

"But it is bad luck to attack a man who occupies a very high position."

He said good-bye to Saeed and left. An hour later he brought the food which Saeed ate with great appetite. He sat on the sand under the full moon. He looked from a distance at the light coming from Tarazān's Cafe over the hill and imagined the gathering of the people in the room.

He really does not like loneliness. And he, among people, grows bigger and bigger, like a giant, practicing love, leadership, and heroism. Without this he cannot enjoy life. But Noor, has she come back? Is she ever going to come back? Will he go back to her, or to his killing loneliness?

He stood up, shook the dust out of his trousers, and walked toward the forest to go back to the road which goes round Madāfin al-Shaheed from the western side. In the place where he first attacked Beyāza, two persons came out of nowhere. They suddenly jumped toward him until he was surrounded on both sides. One of them said, in a sophisticated country accent, "Stop."

The other shouted, "Your identification card!"

The first person then directed a flashlight at his face. He bent his head down as if he were protecting his eyes from the light and in an unexpected roughness at the same time he cried, "Who are you? Speak up."

The two men were surprised by this demanding accent, but they recognized his clothes in the light of the flashlight. The first one said, "Very sorry, officer, we did not recognize your identity in the shadow of the forest!"

He shouted roughly, "Who are you?"

They quickly replied, "From al-Waiely police force, Sir."

Though the light was out, he read something suspicious in the other one's face. He saw him looking at him with great concentration, as if he suspected something. He was afraid to lose the chance and without any hesitation he dealt two strong blows with his fists in the stomachs of the two men, both at the same time. They staggered. Before they could collect themselves he went on beating them in their weakest spots, their jaws and the upper part of their stomachs, until they fell down and fainted. Then he ran away as fast as he could. He made for Najm al-Dīn Street and stood at its curve for some time to make sure that nobody was following him. He went back to the house, but found it as empty as he had left it. He found desertion, anxiety, and depression waiting for him. He took off his jacket and threw himself on the sofa in the darkness. He asked himself in a sad and loud voice, "Noor, where are you?"

She can't be safe, impossible! Have the police captured her? Have some rascals beaten her? She is in trouble. With his instinct and his heart, he believed this. He would not see Noor any more.

Despair choked him and he was extremely sad, not because he was very soon going to lose his secure hideaway, but because he would lose sympathy, love, and human kindness. With his eyes in the darkness, he imagined her with her sweet smile, her joking air, her love, and her misery. His heart thumped. He realized that he loved her more than he would admit, and that she was an essential part of his life staggering on the edge of the abyss. He closed his eyes in the darkness and admitted to himself that he was in love with her, and that he would sacrifice anything to get her back safely. He heaved an angry sigh, saying to himself, "Who would care for her loss!"

She won't even get a look of sympathy. A woman with no support in life, amidst an ocean of indifference and hostility. And Sanā', too might find herself one day with no one to care for her. His heart beat rapidly in anger and fear. He took his gun and pointed it at nothing in the darkness, as if he were warning the unknown.

The delirium of silence and darkness soon exhausted him until he was overcome by sleep just toward dawn. He opened his eyes in daylight and he realized that someone was knocking at the door. He got up, very disturbed, and then walked on his toes to the entrance of the apartment while the knocking on the door was still going on.

A woman's voice called loudly, "Madame Noor, Madame Noor!"

Who is the woman and what does she want? He went back to the room and came back with his gun as a precaution.

But suddenly a man's voice was heard, "Maybe she went out."

But the woman said, "At this time she is usually at home, and she hasn't been late paying her rent."

It was the landlady. The woman knocked angrily on the door and

said, "Today is the fifth of the month and I will not be patient any more!" Together with the man she went away while they were exchanging threatening words.

Saeed realized that chance incidents chased him like the police. The woman would not wait any longer before she found one way or another to get into the apartment. He thought the best thing to do was leave the apartment at his earliest convenience. But where to?

Chapter XVII

In the afternoon, and then in the evening the landlady came back to knock at the door. Then she came back again, saying, "No, no, Madame Noor, everything must have an end." At midnight he sneaked out of the house. Although he had lost confidence in everything, he walked normally and slowly, as if he were taking a stroll. He thought, more than once, that the pedestrians and the loafers were nothing but informers. He was ready to enter his last desperate battle. He had no doubt that after yesterday's battle the police were occupying the whole area of Tarazān's Cafe. Thus he went to the mountain road. He was starving and he found himself thinking of Sheikh 'Ali al-Jenaidī's place as a temporary hiding place to give himself time for thinking and action. He sneaked to the back yard of the silent house. At that moment, and only then, did he remember that he had forgotten his officer's uniform in the living room at Noor's house, a matter which made him very angry, but he went on to the Sheikh's room. He saw the Sheikh sitting in the shade of the lamp in the corner where he usually performs his prayers, murmuring. He went to the wall of the room where he had left his books and sat down, very exhausted.

The Sheikh went on in his murmuring as Saeed said, "Good evening, Master."

The Sheikh raised his hand to his head as to greet him without interrupting his prayers. Saeed said, "Master, I am hungry."

He thought that he interrupted his prayers and glanced at him with blank eyes and then signaled with his chin to a cupboard on which Saeed saw some figs and bread. He approached the food without

hesitation and eagerly finished it. He looked at the Sheikh still with an expression of hunger. The Sheikh asked, "Do you have any money?"

"Yes, I do."

"Go and buy something to eat."

He silently went back to his place and the Sheikh looked at him for sometime and asked, "When will you settle down?"

"Not on the surface of this earth."

"That is why you are hungry in spite of the money you have."

"So what?"

"As for me, I was reciting some poetry about grief and sadness, but with a happy heart."

"You are a happy Sheikh." Then with anger he burst out, "The rascals have escaped! How could I settle down?"

"How many are they?"

"Three."

"Blessed be this life if it has only three rascals."

"There are many, but my rivals are only three."

"Then no one has escaped."

"I am not responsible for this world."

"You are responsible for this world and the next."

He heaved an impatient sigh.

The Sheikh said, "Patience is a virtue."

Saeed murmured sadly, "The criminals are safe, but the innocents fall down."

The Sheikh asked, after hearing a sigh, "When do we achieve peace of mind and accept the judgment?"

Saeed answered, "When the judgment is just."

"He is always just."

Saeed moved his head angrily and murmured, "Unfortunately, the rascals have escaped, how bad!" The Sheikh smiled but did not say a word.

Then Saeed said in a new tone of voice, to change the subject, "I will sleep with my face to the wall, I don't want to be seen by any of your disciples. I am taking refuge at your place; protect me!"

The Sheikh mercifully said, "Only God gives refuge."

He asked him, "Would you give me up?"

"God forbid."

Then he inquired in despair, "Can you save me?"

"You can save yourself if you want."

Saeed whispered to himself, "I kill the innocents." Then in a loud voice, "Can you straighten up the shadow of something bent?"

The Sheikh said tenderly, "I don't care about shadows!" The place swarmed in silence and the moonlight overflowed through the small round window. The Sheikh, with a soft low voice murmured, "It is nothing but your temptation."

Saeed said that the Sheikh will always find what to say, and your house, Master, is not secure although you are security itself; I have to escape whatever it might cost me.

But you, Noor, let chances preserve you if you need justice and mercy. But how did I forget the uniform? You wrapped it to take it with you, so how did you forget it at the last moment? You really have lost the best of your character through loneliness, darkness, and anxiety. But they might find in the uniform the first thread that leads to you. The dogs might smell it and then spread in the four

corners of the earth in order for the tragedy to be completed so that newspaper readers might find something to spend the time with.

Suddenly the Sheikh murmured sadly, "I have asked you to turn your head up to the sky, but here, you prefer to bury your face in the wall."

"But don't you remember anything about what I've just told you about the rascals?"

"And call thy Lord to mind when thou forgettest" said the Sheikh.

Saeed then looked down very sadly and asked himself how he ever forgot the uniform. Troubling ideas came back to his mind.

The Sheikh said, as if he were talking to another person, "It was asked, would any charm or any medicine protect you against what God ordained?" He answered, "It's ordained."

"What do you mean?" Saeed asked.

He said in a sorry voice. "Your father could always understand what I mean!"

Saeed said abruptly, "Too bad that I have not found enough food here. Too bad that I have forgotten the uniform. Also, I find it difficult to understand you and I will bury my face in the wall, but I am sure that I am right."

With sympathy the Sheikh smiled and said, "He, my Master, said: 'I look at the mirror everyday for fear of finding that my face turned into black.'"

"You?"

"No, it is my Master, himself!"

He asked sarcastically, "How could the rascals look at the mirror every minute?"

The Sheikh bent his head as he was reciting, "It is only your

temptation."

Saeed closed his eyes saying to himself, "I am really tired, but I will never be relaxed until I get the uniform back."

Chapter XVIII

He got so exhausted that he slept in spite of his insistence on bringing the uniform. He got up before noon, but he had to wait till evening. At the same time he planned an escape, but he also had to wait for a long time until the police left Tarazān's territory, because Tarazān was the core of his plan. Just after midnight he went to Najm al-Dīn Street, where he saw some light coming through the apartment's window. Astonished, he looked through the window until he was sure of what he had seen. His heartbeats were so loud they deafened his ears. A wave of happiness came over him until it took him out of the nightmare.

Noor is there. Where has she been? He will know the reasons of her disappearance. She came back! Now, she is asking herself about his whereabouts, suffering the waves of hell in which he was burned. His heart assures him that she has returned. The sadness of desperation will soon vanish for sometime and maybe forever, and he will take her in his arms and will admit his love.

He sneaked into the house, drunk with the happiness and victory of her homecoming. He took the stairs, dreaming of unlimited happiness. He would run away with her, settle down for a long time and then, he would come back one day to settle with his enemies. He approached the door of the apartment breathless.

I love you Noor, I love you with all my heart. Mine is a much greater love than yours. In your arms I will bury my loss -- the betrayal of the rascals and the rejection of my daughter.

He knocked at the door. The door was opened to show a man's face, a short man in his underwear. Saeed almost collapsed. The

man stared at him and asked, "Who are you, Sir?"

Very soon a suspicious and frightened look replaced the inquisitive one. Saeed was sure the man was going to recognize him; without hesitation, he blocked the man's mouth with his left hand and hit him in his stomach with the other hand. He dragged him with his hands to the door-step to avoid making any noise. He thought of getting into the room to look for the uniform, but he was not sure that it was empty.

Suddenly a woman's voice asked from inside the apartment, "What is it, Mua'lim?"

He turned desperately and jumped down the stairs to get out. He ran through the Factories Road until he reached the Mountain Road. There he thought he saw some people moving in the dark. He prostrated himself under a wall. When he made sure that there was no trace of a human being on the road, he started to move. He sneaked again to the Sheikh's house. The Sheikh sat in his usual corner of the room, waiting for the dawn prayer calling. Saeed took off his suit and lay on the mat, burying his face in the wall in a desperate attempt to sleep.

The Sheikh said, "Go to sleep. For people like you, sleep is a kind of worship." Saeed kept silent. The Sheikh murmured, "Praise be to Allāh."

Saeed kept awake until dawn, when he heard the calling of the milkman. He did not realize that he went to sleep until he had a nightmare. When he opened his eyes, he found the pale light of the gas lamp spread over the room like mist. He realized that he had only slept for an hour. He looked at the Sheikh's bed, but discovered that it was empty. Near his pile of books he saw some meat, figs, and a jar of water. Thank you, Master. But when did you get this food?

Outside the room he heard voices and looked out. To his astonishment, he saw the followers of the Sheikh sitting on mats. A worker was lighting the gas lamp on top of the outside door. God, it is sunset not dawn, which means that I slept all day without knowing it.

He had slept very deeply. He postponed thinking of anything until he ate. He devoured the food and drank to his satisfaction, then he put on his suit, leaned his back on his books and stretched his legs. Soon, his head was crowded with thoughts of the forgotten uniform, the man who opened the door of Noor's apartment, Sanā', Noor, Ra'ūf, Nabawiya, 'Elaīsh, the informers, Tarazān, and the car with which he would break through the siege.

There is no place now for patience or hesitation. You have to get in touch with Tarazān tonight at any price, even if you have to creep to him on the sand. Tomorrow the police will turn the mountain upside down looking for him, but terror will overcome the rascals.

He heard the clapping of a man outside, and the men suddenly became silent. Sheikh 'Alī al-Jinaidī repeated "Allah" three times. The others repeated after him, "Allah," as they formed a circle to start their religious chanting. The chanting became faster, louder, and then accelerated more until it became like the sound of a train going at high speed. This went on for some time until its momentum weakened bit by bit. The tempo slowed down until the whole movement died away in silence. A solemn voice then chanted some verses.

"Alas life has come to an end, and I couldn't win your favor/
Life is but a fluctuating experience. One day fair and happy and the other you're miserable." Cries of admiration were heard in the corners. Another voice chanted. "Enough suffering to languish in love/ Trapped

between my longing for you and my destiny."

Cries of admiration were heard again. Chanting went on until the Sheikh clapped again, calling for the resumption of the ritual. The name of God was then mentioned over and over again.

Saeed kept listening until it was dark. Remembrances overshadowed his mind like clouds. He remembered the image of his father, Mahrān, swaying with the performers of the ritual. The boy, Saeed, sat at the palm tree watching the scene with his eyes wide open. Out of the darkness images of immortality in the shadow of God erupted. Great hopes glittered in the darkness, casting off the dust of forgetfulness. Under the sole palm tree in the district street, there were heard tender whispers like joys of a new dawn. Little Sanā' talked in his arms in a ravishing, primitive tone. Burning breaths blew from the depths of hell. Then severe blows of pain were felt. Chants of the singers went on, followed each time by the sighs of the men performing the ritual.

"Life has come to an end, and I couldn't win your favor."

This gun in my pocket will have to be reckoned with. It must win victory over treachery and corruption. For the first time the thief will chase the dogs.

An ugly voice came from the little window. He heard voices saying, "The whole area is besieged."

"As if it were war days."

"Saeed Mahrān."

As if electrified, he shrank as his hand clasped his gun. He was all ears. He looked around. A crowded place, suitable for detectives.

I must not let events overtake me. They are now examining the uniform, and they have dogs with them. In here, you're vulnerable, bare and exposed to the danger of being seen. If the desert road is full of police, then at a short distance lies the valley of death. I'll fight to death.

He got up, approaching the door. Everybody was busy performing the ritual, and the corridor to the door was empty. He slipped out of the door and went into the road. He turned left, pretending to walk calmly, and went down toward the cemetery. The night was dark and the moon was not up yet. Darkness was a wall, blocking the road. As he plunged into the cemetery, he found himself in a labyrinth of infinity with nothing to guide his steps. He stumbled, unable to know whether he was going backward or forward. In spite of his feeling that there was no glimpse of hope, he felt very active and energetic. He heard voices carried over by the warm air. He wished he could hide in one of the tombs, but he went on walking. He feared dogs and therefore he was unable to stop. After some minutes' walk, he found himself at the end of the last row of tombs, where he was confronted with the familiar sight of the northern entrance of the cemetery leading to Najm al-Dīn Street. Yes, this is Najm al-Dīn Street, and this is the sole house standing there. There is the window open, with a streak of light coming out of it. He looked carefully and saw the head of a woman in the window. Although he could not define the features, the face reminded him of Noor. His heart started to beat quickly and strongly. Did Noor come back or did his eyes mislead him as his heart did yesterday?

You've become uncertain of everything, which is a sign that the

end is approaching. If it is Noor, what of it? You only want her to take care of Sanā' if your hour comes.

At the risk of revealing his identity, he decided to call her. Before he could raise his voice, he heard the barking of dogs at a distance. Then the barking continued, like the sound of successive bullets. He went back, terrified, to the middle of the cemetery. The barking became louder and louder. He leaned his back on a tomb and pointed his gun, staring in the darkness, sure of the end.

At last the dogs have come and there is no hope. The rascals have got away with what they did, even for a while. He utters his last word. Life is an absurdity.

It was impossible to know where the barking came from; it was carried by the wind from everywhere. No hope to escape darkness by running into darkness.

The rascals are safe and your life is an absurdity. The voice and barking come nearer. Soon, glances of envy and gloating will fall upon your face.

He moved his gun angrily as the barking of the dogs got louder and came nearer. A strong light flooded the place in a circular movement. He shut his eyes and threw himself under the tomb.

A victorious voice shouted, "Surrender! No use of resistance." The ground shook under the heavy feet of policemen, and the flood light spread like the sun. "Surrender, Saeed!"

He stuck closer to the tomb and got ready to shoot. He looked everywhere as a solemn voice cried. "If you surrender, I promise you humane treatment." Humane treatment like that of Ra'ūf, Nabawiya, and the dogs!

"You're surrounded on all sides. The whole cemetery is surrounded by police. Think carefully and surrender."

He was sure that the scattered tombs would not enable the police to see him. He didn't move and intended to die.

A firm voice asked, "Don't you see that resistance is of no use."

He felt that the voice was nearer than before.

Unwillingly, he cried, "Beware of coming nearer!"

"Well, what do you want?"

"Choose between death and standing before justice."

Saeed cried contemptuously, "Justice!"

"Your're obstinate. You have only one minute."

His agonized, frightened eyes saw the shadow of death penetrating the darkness. Sanā' cringed without hope. He felt a deceptive movement. He became angry and fired his gun. Bullets were immediately everywhere around him, and the sound of bullets pierced his ears. Stone chips from the tombs flew in the air. He shot again, unaware of anything, but soon bullets rained down on him.

In madness he cried, "Dogs!" And he kept shooting in all directions.

The floodlight suddenly went off and darkness prevailed. The bullets also stopped and silence was everywhere. He stopped shooting indiscriminately. Silence wrapped the whole world and a state of stunning strangeness overcame the world. He asked himself . . . but soon enough there was no place for more questions. There was no hope. He thought for a moment that they retreated and disappeared in the darkness, and that he must have emerged victorious. The darkness became more dense. He couldn't see anything, not even the shadows

of tombs.

Nothing wants to be seen. He delved deep into infinity without hope, purpose, or aim. He tried hard to be in control of everything, but in vain. At last he had no other way but surrender. He surrendered indifferently . . . indifferently.

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AL-LISS WA 'L-KILĀB (THE THIEF AND THE DOGS) - A
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